Part One

An overnight away mission gives Captain Janeway and Seven of Nine a new insight into each other…

Chapter One

"Captain's log, stardate 54716.6. According to Seven's latest astrometrics report, Voyager will be nearing an M-Class planet orbiting the fifth sun in the Quaxar system. The planet has a compatible atmosphere and dry climate, much like Earth's southwestern United States. There are no life forms, except a few small creatures that resemble the ancient Earth Gila monster. For this reason, the Borg had deemed this planet unworthy of assimilation, leaving it in its natural state. Seven has found a mountain range along the lower hemisphere that looks to be rich in dilithium crystal

deposits. I have arranged for Seven and Lieutenant Torres, with a small team, to transport to the surface and begin mining the dilithium. I am hoping that by putting them together on this away mission they can find a way to work together without resorting to a physical altercation."

Kathryn remembered the last time her Astrometrics Officer and Chief Engineer had a difference of opinion. The sight of the angry half-Klingon flat on the deck being restrained by one silver mesh covered boot had almost caused the captain to chuckle out loud in front of the engineering staff. It took a good dose of command training to keep her expression in check. Thinking of it now caused Kathryn to remember secretly feeling proud of the way Seven handled the situation.

Kathryn closed the log and leaned back in her ready room chair, bringing her fingers to the bridge of her nose in an attempt to forestall the headache she knew was coming. She still had to let Seven and B'Elanna know they would be working together to oversee the mining operation. Forcing this togetherness between her officers was risky, but she also knew that the morale of the senior staff would be greatly improved if the two officers at least developed a cordial working relationship.

Deciding to tackle the wrath of Lieutenant Torres first, the captain made her way down to engineering towards the end of the Alpha shift. Hopefully B'Elanna wouldn't make a scene in front of her staff.

Kathryn found B'Elanna seated at one of the engineering consoles when she arrived. "Good afternoon, Lieutenant. I stopped by to let you know that I am assigning you to an away mission tomorrow. I need your help overseeing the mining of dilithium deposits planet side. This should only take two days. I hope this will not impact your schedule too much."

B'Elanna stood and faced the captain. There was never a convenient time to be away from engineering, but the additional dilithium was always needed. "I understand Captain. I will begin to assemble a team."

"Good, thank you." Kathryn turned to exit engineering and looked back over her shoulder. "By the way, I have assigned Seven to assist you in overseeing the mining. She will be transporting to the surface with you tomorrow." Holding her breath for the explosion she knew was coming, Kathryn took one step toward the exit.

B'Elanna's response was immediate. "Qu'vatlh! You are kidding, right Captain? You can't possibly think it is a good idea for the Ice Queen and I to spend any more time together than is absolutely necessary. Seven is perfectly capable of overseeing the mining team alone. I bet she would prefer to be alone, in fact!" B'Elanna was doing her best to reign in her Klingon temper at the news of her impending away mission. "If she *needs* someone to help her manage the task, can't you send Nicoletti or Chamberlin? I really don't have time to deal with Her Borgness."

Kathryn stopped and turned back to B'Elanna, her displeasure clearly evident on her face. "Lieutenant, might I remind you that Seven of Nine is a valued member of my senior staff and our Voyager extended family. As such, I expect you to not only treat her with the professional respect she is due, but to also find a way to co-exist without me having to worry you are going to take a swing at her."

The captain held up her right hand to forestall the rebuttal she knew was on the tip of B'Elanna's tongue. "In addition, I think it would do both you and Seven some good to spend time together. You are both brilliant engineers and highly capable. Unfortunately you both do not have the benefit of a happy childhood or role models for how to interact with people around you. I think if you gave it a chance you could learn to not only

tolerate each other, but maybe even become friends. This is not open for debate Lieutenant."

The captain gave B'Elanna one of her 'Force Ten' looks as she turned to leave, just for good measure.

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Seven of Nine was at her post in astrometrics when her enhanced hearing alerted her to the captain's arrival. She was surprised when the captain paused slightly in the doorway, before continuing to the workstation to stand beside her. Even without her Borg enhanced senses, she could tell that Janeway was a bit uneasy. Her pulse had increased by 12 percent and her respiration levels were elevated. The captain looked down at her hands for a full 7 seconds before she began to speak.

"Hello Seven, I hope I am not interrupting anything important."

"Captain, I deem all of my work important to the continued functioning of Voyager. Although the analysis of the ion storm we passed three days ago can be postponed if you need to discuss a more pressing matter."

Kathryn never ceased to be amazed at confidence and pride Seven took in her work. To some she came off as arrogant, but Kathryn knew better. She could see through the Borg persona Seven often hid behind. She knew when they met many years ago there was a fragile young lady under all that Borg exoplating, and she also recognized that the Seven who stood at attention before her now was capable of a great deal of caring and loyalty. Seven had demonstrated this in her interactions with Naomi Wildman, often playing Kadis-Kot or joining her during one of the many 'The Adventures of Flotter' holodeck programs.
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Seven caught the captain glancing at her with a half-smile, and for some reason this caused her pulse to increase and a warm sensation to settle in her chest cavity. Curiously, this physical response seemed to happen every time she saw the captain smile. Or laugh. Or look at her across the briefing room table. The captain always found the best interpretations of her actions, interpretations she did not even realize she was capable of. She also found it curious that often the captain opened her mouth as if she wanted to tell her something, but then censured herself. Seven found herself staring at the captain's wine colored lips, not for the first time, as she waited for her to speak.

The Captain drew in a deep breath and turned to fully face Seven. "Seven, I am assigning you to a short away mission to lead a team and assist in the mining of dilithium planet-side. You will transport to the surface at 0800 hours tomorrow to begin this task."

"I will comply" came the automatic response from Seven. She continued to stand facing her workstation with her hands clasped behind her back as she regarded the captain quizzically with a sideways glance. "Captain, may I ask a question?"

"Of course Seven, I am always happy to answer your questions." Kathryn did her best not to let her gaze linger longer than appropriate at Seven's crystal blue eyes.

"When you arrived here a short time ago, you paused for 7.4 seconds inside the doorway. Just now, before telling me of the away mission, you seemed to spend a long time contemplating your hands on the workstation. I am curious Captain, what is the cause of your hesitation?" Seven raised the ocular implant over her left eye in a gesture the captain always found endearing.

“I am not hesitant Seven. I…” Janeway paused to think of the right way to frame her next statement, validating Seven’s observation in the process. “…I just took a few moments to evaluate my decision about your upcoming away mission.”

“Why would you need additional time to evaluate sending me to collect dilithium deposits Captain?”

“Well the part I have not told you yet is that I am also assigning Lieutenant Torres on this away mission. B’Elanna will be joining you in this task.” Kathryn silently hoped that the breath she was holding would not be obvious.

Although Seven tried not to let her feelings show, Kathryn caught a fleeting glimpse of fear in her eyes. She abruptly turned her head back to the workstation in front of her and began taping a sequence of numbers. The last thing Seven wanted was for the captain to see that she was uneasy about this away mission. The muscles in Seven’s jaw twitched, indicating that she was clenching her teeth.

Kathryn felt a small pang of guilt for the discomfort she knew the ex-Borg was feeling. Stepping forward into Seven’s personal space, she gently laid her left hand atop the plum mesh covered forearm. Seven immediately felt the warmth of her captain’s touch and the gentle pressure of her fingers as she gave her a reassuring squeeze. Looking down at the elegant fingers that rested on her right arm, Seven experienced a slight involuntary shudder. This response would have to be analyzed later, Seven noted to herself as she filed the information away in her cortical node.

Kathryn felt the slight trembling in Seven’s arm too. Fearing she had caused Seven significant distress, Kathryn reached around with her right hand and placed it on Seven’s other arm to turn her so they were facing each other. The captain was not prepared for the intense physical reaction she felt travel down her arms to settle in the

pit of her stomach as Seven stood facing her, well within her own personal space. Kathryn licked her lips subconsciously before she looked up into the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen.

When Seven raised her chin to look at her captain, her breath caught in her throat. Seeing the tip of Kathryn's tongue slide along her bottom lip had to be the most fascinating thing she had witnessed in recent memory. Her eyes grew wide in surprise, betraying the disinterested façade she was trying to maintain.

"Seven, I understand this causes you some difficulty. I honestly believe the opportunity to work closely with B'Elanna will be a time of great personal growth for you." The captain went on to further explain her rationale. "You have not had the same years of experience interacting with the people around you. During Human adolescence, we are compelled to spend time with a wide variety of personalities as we go through our primary and secondary schooling. It was typically an awkward time for most people as we learned to adjust to the different characteristics of those around us. Some people we got on with well and they became our friends. Others may have been difficult to endure, so those people never got past the acquaintance level of interaction. The Borg took these years away from you and by doing so deprived you of this critical growth time in your personal development."

"You are correct Captain. The Borg maturation chambers were not conducive to social interaction. I spent those years in isolation with only a few essential implants maintaining my biological functions as my body grew into its adult form." Seven looked down at her left hand with sad eyes.

Kathryn's heart wrenched for the pain Seven must have endured. Thankfully the physical pain of implantation was erased from her eidetic memory. The emotional trauma, Kathryn feared, was only starting to bubble to the surface. Seven had no fond

memories of her teenage years to refer back to. No birthday parties or school dances. No first crushes or best friends. The young girl known as Annika Hansen had been taken from everything she knew and loved and locked away to emerge as an unfeeling machine with a designation, rather than a name.

Kathryn recognized the tight feeling that was overcoming her as she thought of all Seven had lost. Her utter contempt for the Borg and the anger that threatened to taint her voice made Kathryn take a step back and drop her hands to her sides, her fists clenching involuntarily.

Seven felt the change in the captain's demeanor and silently mourned the loss of the warm touch emanating from the captain's fingertips. The captain seemed to revert into her full Captain Mode, with her eyes changing to a dark gray. This happened every time their conversations turned to matters of Seven's past and her Borg history. Seven thought the captain must be quite put off by her remaining implants since they were a blatant reminder that she was Borg. That she would never be fully human. To Seven, this was even more painful. She reached up to touch her ocular implant in a subconscious gesture as a feeling of sadness washed over her.

Kathryn knew she had to redirect the conversation back to something current, something that would get Seven to focus forward rather than think backward. "Seven, these few days with B'Elanna will not be as bad as you are anticipating. She has promised to be cooperative and keep her temper in check. Think of it as a chance to get away for a few days. A different environment and some fresh air planet-side would do you both a world of good. Try to view it as a 'girl's getaway' with a little dilithium mining thrown in."

"Captain, I have no assimilated information on a 'girl's getaway' as you referenced. The only approximation I can relate to would be one of Naomi's holodeck programs. On

Stardate 51724 Samantha Wildman and I participated in "Flotter Has a Slumber Party" where a grouping of females gathered and shared regenerating space for one night. Samantha attempted to explain that human females often engage in this activity during their formative years. Naomi wanted to apply a substance comprised of toluene, dibutyl phthalate and formaldehyde to my fingertips in a bright pink color. It was an inefficient addition of artificial color with no benefit that I could discern, but I did allow it to please Naomi."

Kathryn was amused at the image of Seven getting her nails polished by Naomi, but she kept that to herself. It was this side of Seven that more of the crew needed to see. The part of Seven that would sit patiently while the 'inefficient addition of artificial color' was applied to her fingers. "Yes Seven, that is a good example of a 'girl's getaway.' These slumber parties were a staple of human female experiences. I even participated in a few myself." Kathryn's face grew wistful as she continued. "While my father was away on classified Starfleet missions, Phoebe and I would have a few friends over to the farm to stay the weekend. Mother would make caramel fudge brownies and we would stay up long past our bed times watching old Earth movies produced by a company called 'Disney.' Those nights of jumping on our mattresses or stuffing our faces with popcorn are some of my fondest memories."

Seven thought the look on the captain's face as she described this memory was much more pleasing than the command mask she usually wore. This sensation was added to the growing list of feelings invoked by Captain Janeway to be analyzed after her duty shift.

"How about this Seven… think of the next few days with B'Elanna as a slumber party of sorts. I am sure that you and B'Elanna can find something to talk about other than EPS relays and warp core containment contingency plans. I will even replicate some of my mother's brownies to take with you. If B'Elanna starts to get out of line, placate her with

sweets. That always works." Kathryn smiled at the image of her Chief Engineer with chocolate all over her face.

Seven liked seeing her captain smile. She liked it very much in fact. If sharing caramel brownies would generate this pleasing reaction from the captain, then Seven would see to it that Kathryn had the opportunity to indulge in these confections as often as possible. Perhaps she could save some of the brownies and bring them back to share with the captain upon completion of the away mission. Or… she could share them during the mission. An idea was born.

"Captain, I will comply with your request to 'bond' with B'Elanna under one condition." Her ocular implant raised in a slight challenge as she waited for the captain's response.

"Of course Seven. I will do whatever I can to make this away mission more enjoyable for you."

"Then you must accompany us on our 'girl's getaway' tomorrow. According to Naomi, the experience is more enjoyable with additional females in attendance. B'Elanna and I will participate in the dilithium mining task with the away team while you make preparations for the 'slumber party' when we return at the end of the shift. *Think of it as a chance to get away for a few days.*" Seven parroted the captain's words back to her with a mischievous cadence to her voice.

The twinkle in Seven's eyes was unmistakable. She even gave Kathryn a very faint smile, clearly pleased with herself for coming up with the idea to compel the captain into the away mission. When Kathryn hesitated, Seven did the one thing that Captain Janeway could not resist… she said *'please.'*

Kathryn knew she had been had. There was no way she could deny Seven when it meant that much to her and she asked so nicely. The way her eyes lit up coupled with the innocent grin that spread across her lovely mouth got Kathryn every time. *'This might not be so bad'* she thought to herself. *'I get to spend time with Seven away from the ship.'* Kathryn smiled broadly at this thought, before she remembered that they would also be sharing sleeping accommodations with a grouchy Klingon.

The captain threw up her hands in a surrendering gesture. "You win Seven. I could use a change of scenery and we seem to be in a relatively quiet area of space for a change. Barring any red alerts, I will go with you and B'Elanna on the away mission. See you tomorrow morning at 0800 in the transporter room." With that Kathryn turned and headed for the doors. When they opened, she paused in the threshold and looked back over her shoulder. Seven caught the look in her captain's eyes and felt that warming sensation all over again. This would surely warrant further exploration after her duty shift.

Chapter Two

Kathryn arrived on the bridge and went straight to her ready room. "You have the bridge Commander." She was glad it was the Beta shift with Tuvok in command, which meant that her time would have fewer interruptions. The captain desperately needed some coffee, and time to quell the tide of emotions that were threatening to crumble her command mask.

"Coffee. Black." Kathryn waited as the replicator materialized her favorite mug with the steaming hot brew. She sat in her ready room chair and inhaled the coffee aroma in an attempt to clear her head.

This was not the first time that Seven's physical proximity had caused Kathryn to question her feelings towards the beautiful ex-Borg. Back on Stardate 52619, after rescuing Seven literally out of the Borg Queen's chamber, Kathryn and Seven had a very intimate exchange in cargo bay two prior to her regeneration. Seven had been ordered to regenerate, so Kathryn went to check on her to be sure she heeded the Doctor's directions. She could remember the conversation quite clearly, even without the benefit of a cortical implant.

"I see you've picked up some bad habits."

"Captain?"

"The Doctor told you to regenerate for at least two days. You're violating a direct medical command."

"I will comply when my work is completed."

"Borg tactical data?"

"During my time at Unimatrix One I acquired a vast amount of knowledge. It may prove useful in our future encounters with the Borg. I am downloading it into Voyager's database. The Borg believed I was unique, that I understood humanity. They were obviously mistaken."

"How so?"

"I betrayed the crew of Voyager, threatened you with assimilation. I did not expect you to return for me."

"Looks like you still have a few things to learn. Time to regenerate."

"When I am finished."

"No, now. That's an order.

"Yes, Captain."

Kathryn smiled as she remembered following Seven to her alcove and keying in the command sequence to commence the regeneration cycle. As Seven stepped up on the dais and settled into the alcove, her eyes closed and her body assumed its rigid regeneration posture. '*Sweet dreams'* she had whispered to Seven.

Kathryn thought of the many nights both before and after this in which she secretly lingered in cargo bay two, watching from the shadows of the large containers while Seven 'slept' peacefully. There was something different about that time though. Seven looked more content, more relaxed, and even more lovely. Her facial features appeared softer and her lips curved into the slightest of smiles. Kathryn remembered as she stepped down and turned to leave, there was the faintest whisper of a word from Seven's lips. *'Kathryn…'*

Hearing her name whispered in such an intimate manner had brought a tingling sensation to Kathryn's chest, a sensation she could feel even now just thinking about it. That was the turning point, the time Kathryn was forced to face the changing emotions she felt for her Astrometrics Officer. What she has previously ascribed as the protective feelings of a mentor or guardian had become so much more. Kathryn was forced to acknowledge that her feelings, her *desires* for Seven were very real. This realization gave her no comfort though. As Captain, she was duty bound to put her personal feelings aside as she guided her crew home. It was not advisable for a Captain to become romantically involved with a member of her crew. *'Although technically she is not in Starfleet…'* Kathryn reasoned with herself. She had it bad, and was being forced with each passing day to admit it. She was captivated not only by Seven's classic physical beauty, but her inquisitive mind and fiercely loyal demeanor. Seven could be downright infuriating at times, but she also had a vulnerable side that Kathryn had seen

slip through on occasion. Seven could challenge her like nobody would ever dare to, and she could make her realize things about herself she had not pondered in years. Kathryn could not recall the last time she thought about eating popcorn or jumping on a mattress. The longing for home and family always tugged at her heart, but now when she thought about Gretchen and Phoebe sitting around the farmhouse kitchen table… Seven was there in one of the well-worn wooden chairs.

'Well Katie, you promised to guide her return to humanity. You had better replicate some appropriate PJs for an old-fashioned slumber party.' Kathryn groaned at her inner voice, which suspiciously had the teasing tones of her sister.

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Seven tapped her combadge to activate the hail. "Seven of Nine to Lieutenant Torres"

"Torres here. Whatchya want Seven?"

"Lieutenant I require… I would like to speak with you. Would it be convenient for you to come to astrometrics?"

"I'm a bit busy here Seven, since I am being assigned to that away mission tomorrow. Can it wait until then?"

B'Elanna thought she heard a sigh as Seven hesitantly responded. "It is not an urgent matter. I will seek advice from another source. Seven out."

In engineering B'Elanna stood silent long after the hail was closed as she realized that Seven was asking her for advice. B'Elanna's curiosity was piqued. Plus there was something in Seven's tone of voice that sounded remotely… disappointed. "Hey Vorik, I
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need you to take over reviewing these sensor readings. I will be in astrometrics. Hail me if you find anything out of the ordinary."

As B'Elanna made her way up to deck eight, she wondered what could have prompted the Ice Queen to seek her out. Historically they mixed like oil and water. Secretly B'Elanna had to admit to a certain amount of jealousy for the ex-Borg. Seven was the brilliant one who always had the right answers in almost every situation. Seven was the one that Janeway had taken under her wing and shared her off duty time with. Seven was the one that all the men – and women – were attracted to. The funny part was that Seven had absolutely no idea the effect she had on the crew. There was nobody, except maybe the Captain, who could get behind Seven's cold automated exterior. This made Seven quite unapproachable and self-sufficient, a far cry different than the polite and hesitant Seven who just hailed her.

Seven was able to discern the heavy footsteps of Lieutenant Torres, even before the astrometrics doors closed behind her. As B'Elanna approached Seven's workstation she caught a fleeting glimpse of Voyager's Recreational Database menu. B'Elanna thought it was slightly odd to find Seven researching anything having to do with fun or recreation. As she walked over to the console to stand next to Seven, she noticed the ex-Borg's posture stiffen into her usual at-attention stance. There was something different about her eyes though, and she kept looking directly at Seven trying to figure it out.

"How may I assist you Lieutenant Torres?" came the detached question from Seven.

"Hey so I left Vorik down in engineering reviewing the sensor readings. I have looked over them so many times the numbers are starting to jumble together before my eyes. Your hail said something about needing advice?"

“Lieutenant Torres, regardless of the number of times you review the sensor readings, the numbers will remain in their current position. I do not understand how they can ‘jumble’ on the screen. Explain… please.”

B’Elanna thought she must be more fatigued than she originally considered, because Seven never said ‘please’ or asked for clarification. For a moment she thought maybe she had imagined it. “It’s an expression Seven. It means that I have reviewed the same information too many times, to the point that my eyes do not focus clearly on the information displayed any longer.”

“I believe I understand your meaning, although I have no practical experience with this sensation. My cortical processor will not permit any data to ‘jumble’ regardless of how many times I access the information.

“Well we all can’t be the Bionic Woman Seven.” While Seven took a moment to access her assimilated knowledge related to bionics in females, B’Elanna took the chance to push past Seven to see what she had been looking at in the Recreational Database.

“So Seven, what did you need advice on?” B’Elanna asked as she called up this history of recent database queries. When the computer displayed entries for ‘Girl’s Getaway’ and ‘Slumber Party’ B’Elanna’s curiosity went into overdrive.

Seven attempted to reach around the stocky Klingon to close the database search. The last thing she needed was a nosy B’Elanna telling anybody who would listen that she was looking at the parameters of a successful slumber party. It was common knowledge aboard Voyager that B’Elanna would talk about anybody to anyone who would listen.

"It is not an important matter Lieutenant. I thought better of interrupting you and opted to review the computer database for the information I was seeking. I apologize for inconveniencing you."

B'Elanna stopped to consider what she had just seen on the computer. When she looked up at Seven, there was a vulnerability in her expression that – if she honestly admitted it to herself – was quite lovely. B'Elanna softened her voice and smiled. "It's OK Seven, tell me what you were looking for and I will see if I can help you. I've got some time, unless Vorik really screws things up in engineering."

"As you wish, Lieutenant Torres." Seven drew in a deep breath and paused before continuing. Opening up to B'Elanna would please the captain, so she decided it was worth the risk. "I was endeavoring to understand the human concept of a 'slumber party' in preparation for our away mission tomorrow. The Capta…"

"Wait. What? Hold on a minute Seven. Where did you get the notion that it is a slumber party? We are transporting planet-side to mine dilithium. I do not believe I signed up for pillow fights and pedicures!" B'Elanna was completely confused, if not a little amused at the notion of a certain ex-Borg with down pillow feathers in her hair.

"The Captain was attempting to alleviate my hesitation about the mission and told me to *'think of it as a slumber party.'* She felt that you and I would both benefit from some form of the human adolescent ritual we never experienced in our formative years."

"Oh I experienced one or two slumber parties in my youth. One of them was with a group of extended cousins on my mother's side of the family. We jumped on the beds and listened to loud Klingon battle chants while we pretended to be warriors in the Battle of Qam-Chee. Then we managed to destroy most of the furnishings in the room." B'Elanna's smile was wide enough to show the sharp edges of her teeth.

“Indeed.” The single word reply from Seven, with accompanied by a raised ocular implant. “You said you attended more than one such party. What was the other occasion?”

At this, B’Elanna’s eyes shifted down to the deck and she shrugged her shoulders. “It was some stupid thing at school. The teacher forced the human girls to invite me, but nobody wanted me there. One girl cried to her mother that I was going to slice her open with a Bat’leth while she slept. My father tried to convince me to go, telling me it would be fun, but I refused and ran away for two days.”

Seven felt something she had never felt before – empathy for the Klingon/Human woman in front of her. She was sure it was far better to have been denied the experience all together than be forced to endure the alienation from the other girls which B’Elanna had described.

“If it’s okay with you Seven, I would prefer to just finish the mining and come back to the ship with the rest of the away team. I really do not want to play pretend slumber party with you.” B’Elanna had a pained expression that made the ridges on her forehead stand out even more.

“I do not believe we will be able to return to the ship after our duty shift Lieutenant. The Captain is coming with us on the away mission tomorrow and is making plans for us to stay down on the planet overnight. It is my opinion that she plans to use this away mission to restore some piece of humanity I was denied. She became quite animated when describing one such event from her adolescence. I think the Captain is looking forward to this.”

“Kahless Seven! This means that we will need to be on our best behavior around the Captain. I think we can get along for small periods of time, but sharing an environmental habitat with you and the Captain for even one night makes my teeth hurt.”

“It is okay Lieutenant. The Captain said she was bringing her mother’s caramel brownies and that if you got out of line I was to feed you one.” Seven found the look of indignation on B’Elanna’s face quite pleasing. This propelled her to continue the slight bit of teasing. “Apparently there is some calming effect to the chocolate. Tell me, is this specific to Klingons? I have seen the opposite reaction when Naomi had a second helping of chocolate pudding. She becomes much more agitated after ingesting the confection.” Seven’s eyes sparkled with a look of amusement. B’Elanna noticed that when Seven spoke of the Captain, her whole body changed. Her eyes were bright and her full lips almost smiled. She had never seen Seven look this lovely, and wondered just what exactly the Captain had to do with this change.

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At 2230 hours the captain finally finished the departmental reports Chakotay had left in her ready room. If she was to be gone for two days, Kathryn wanted the lingering administrative tasks done so she could focus on the away mission – and her time with Seven. *‘Katie, remember that B’Elanna will be there too. This is not some secret rendezvous with the leggy blond.’* Kathryn cursed her sister’s voice in her head yet again for highlighting just exactly what she was thinking. She returned to her quarters on deck three to begin packing for the mission in the morning.

Kathryn had decided to try to make this fun for Seven… and B’Elanna. She had three small tins of her mother’s caramel brownies in stasis, knowing that B’Elanna would probably eat two of them by herself. She also planned to bring a thermos of coffee. The standard Starfleet issue environmental habitats were equipped with the basics in food
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and comfort, but a whole day of ration bars would put her over the edge. She knew that seven would prefer the ration bars since she did not eat very much food yet, but that did not mean that she and B'Elanna had to suffer the same fate. Being the Captain did have some perks, and the ability to bring additional necessities – like coffee – was a luxury she did not deny herself. To round out the experience, she also made arrangements with Commander Tuvok for some special meal deliveries during the course of the mission.

Kathryn would transport to the planet in her uniform, but planned to bring along civilian clothing and hiking boots in the hope she would find some time for relaxation and exploration. Knowing B'Elanna, she would pack her own casual clothes, but she was almost certain Seven would only bring a spare biosuit. Kathryn keyed in the code for Seven's uniform profile to access her apparel measurements. She replicate a pair of knit pants and a button down cotton shirt for Seven, hoping she could talk her into trying something beside the form-fitting biosuit she always wore. A pair of slip on sandals completed the ensemble.

For the evening she packed her favorite peach satin nightgown and the matching robe. She was not sure what Seven would like, so she tried to imagine what a younger Annika Hansen would have enjoyed sleeping in. Previously Seven had shared that her favorite color was red. The memory of that conversation, albeit brief, was the first time Kathryn could remember feeling a little more for Seven than she perhaps should. The way she had spoken those words, without even looking at her, had sent chills down Kathryn's spine. *'Have I really had romantic feelings for Seven that long?'* Kathryn shook her head to bring her current task back into focus.

Kathryn returned her attention on the replicator to find some PJs for Seven. She chose a red button down top in a satin fabric, with matching sleep shorts. The fabric had a subtle leaf pattern and was very soft against the skin. She paused for a moment to

imagine seven in this outfit, pleased at the visual of Seven's long alabaster legs in the red shorts. *'Stop it Katie! Seven is not a pinup girl to be ogled at.'* Kathryn thought better of her sleepwear choice and altered the replicator parameters to make Seven's bottoms full length – with matching slippers for safe measure. For B'Elanna, Kathryn keyed in the parameters for a short sleeve knit pullover in an emerald green color. Her bottoms, Kathryn grinned to herself, were black and liberally decorated with the green outlines of Targs in different sizes. Once she was satisfied with her choices, she packed them, along with her own civilian clothing, in a small cargo container.

"Computer, what is the location of Seven of Nine?"

'Seven of Nine is cargo bay two' recited the feminine voice of Voyager's computer.

Kathryn smiled to herself as she slipped out of her uniform and in to a well-worn pair of Starfleet Academy sweats and a gray tank top. If anyone asked, she would explain that she was going to run the gymnasium program in Holodeck One. A glance at the chronometer on her desk advised her that it was now 2315 hours. She was sure Seven would be regenerating by now. It was the perfect chance to indulge in her favorite bedtime ritual – watching Seven 'sleep.'

When Kathryn arrived outside the doors of cargo bay two, she paused to say hello to Ensigns Ashmore and Molina, who were both coming off their beta shift in engineering. Seven's Borg-enhanced hearing alerted her to the conversation in the corridor, thereby announcing the captain's impending arrival. Seven had suspected that the captain had been watching over her regeneration, even installing a cleverly hidden camera some time back just to be sure. Although she was only subconsciously aware of the captain's presence during regeneration, Seven felt pleased when she reviewed the recording of the captain visiting her on most evenings. Knowing that the captain was just outside, Seven quickly stepped up to her alcove and initiated a regeneration diagnostic cycle.

To all others it would appear that Seven was regenerating regularly. However, this setting allowed Seven to maintain full consciousness so she could 'enjoy' the captain's evening appearance. Seven stood still in the alcove, with her eyes closed, as she waited for the captain to enter.

Kathryn usually kept to the darker corners of the cargo bay and gazed at Seven from a safe distance. For reasons she could not entirely explain, Kathryn felt drawn to the young woman. *'I must be preoccupied with her in preparation for tomorrow'* she surmised to herself. "Computer, seal cargo bay doors. Open only in an emergency or by request of a senior officer. Authorization Janeway-Pi-110."

Quietly Kathryn approached Seven's alcove and stepped up the single level on the right side. She was not sure why she tiptoed, or why she sealed the cargo bay doors for that matter. Seven would not be aware of her presence during her regeneration cycle. Kathryn stood there mesmerized, literally, by the soft sable eyelashes and full peach colored lips. Without realizing she was doing it, Kathryn reached up and gently traced Seven's cheekbone with one elegant finger. "Oh Seven, what am I going to do about these feelings for you?" The words were reverently whispered just under Kathryn's breath.

It took all of Seven's Borg-enhanced self-control to keep her features still and her breathing even. She could not believe the captain had touched her, let alone divulged she had feelings for her. Seven's cortical processor went into overdrive analyzing this new information. Her heart rate skyrocketed and a feeling of liquid fire seemed to blaze through her veins. Still she remained rigid.

Kathryn came around the front of the dais and stood on her tiptoes to reach Seven's porcelain cheek. She couldn't resist placing a feather soft kiss on her jawline, just below

the starburst implant, as she whispered “Sweet dreams darling.” With that, the captain turned, unsealed the doors, and quickly exited the cargo bay.

As soon as the doors swished closed, Seven immediately brought her hand to the spot on her cheek that still tingled with the feeling of the captain’s lips.

Chapter Three

“Captain’s personal log, supplemental. It is 0400 hours and I cannot seem to sleep. Every time I close my eyes, my thoughts drift to Seven. I find myself thinking about all the times we have spent together, on and off duty. Whether it is playing Velocity or discussing the finer points of humanity, I can’t help but think of the possibilities of her as a romantic partner. Of course I am attracted to her sexually. It has been many long and lonely years since we were stranded in this quadrant. But I really feel it runs deeper than that. I fantasize about having her as a daily part of my life, here in my quarters. I can visualize us sharing a meal or me reading her poetry. I imagine the look of wonder on her face when she climbs into her first bubble bath. I also fantasize about what it would be like to wake with her here, in my arms, in my bed…”

Kathryn ran her hands through her auburn hair as the familiar thoughts of Seven in her bed threatened to overtake her. “Computer end log. Encryption code Janeway-Theta-524.”

Kathryn knew she had only four hours until the appointed time for their departure. She also knew it was going take all of her diplomatic training to keep the peace between her two officers, as well as a good dose of command training to keep her emotions reined in. Trying to do this on no sleep would compound her problems. Returning to her

bedroom, she paused to survey the pile of rumpled bed coverings strewn about the deck. When she couldn't sleep, Kathryn tended to toss and turn quite a bit, resulting in the disarray of sheets and blankets. *'If Seven was in your bed, the sheets would be the last thing on your mind'* came Phoebe's taunting internal voice. Kathryn recovered the discarded bedding and climbed back in bed, hoping to salvage a few hours of sleep. She silently agreed with the voice in her head and allowed her mind to drift to thoughts of making love with Seven. Soon the desire coursing through her veins was more than she could take and she let her own hands wander over her body, imagining that one of them was covered in fine silver metal strands. It did not take long for her body to surrender to the sensations she was creating in herself, by herself, as she thought about Seven.

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At precisely 0753 hours Seven reported to transporter room one. She was the first to arrive and begin arranging the various supplies and cargo containers on the transporter pad. It was only intended to be a two day mission, but Seven was compelled to bring her portable regeneration unit with her. She was nothing if not overly cautious. Plus she did not get a full regeneration cycle the previous evening. Thoughts of the captain's feather soft kiss threatened had to overload her cortical processor. The alcove registered the imbalance and self-initiated a lengthy diagnostic protocol. Seven felt a slight bit of fatigue after the abbreviated period of regeneration. She hoped internally that she could benefit from this fatigue when it came time to 'sleep' later that day. Seven hoisted the cumbersome regeneration unit and placed it near the other items to be transported planet-side.

Seven moved around to the workstation next to the transporter controls. She began to access the planet information she had amassed previously. Seven had triple checked her findings on the planet's atmosphere and anticipated weather patterns. Where the
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captain's safety was concerned she would take no chances. She reviewed the chosen coordinates to transport the mining equipment, outside the entrance to a cave system in the rocky hillside. This is where the team of crewmen would join them at 0900 hours. Seven also called up the terrain maps to confirm the nearby water source, a small lake in the center of various rock outcroppings 1.609 kilometers away from the dilithium mining site. Although the lake was in the center of the rock outcroppings, it did have two locations suitable to set up the environmental habitat a short distance from the water's edge. Seven confirmed, for the eight time, that the water was not dangerous and held no harmful wildlife.

The next to arrive at 0757 hours was Captain Janeway. Seven did not hear the captain's approach as she was lost in her own thoughts, remembering the events of the previous evening.

As Kathryn entered the transporter room, she was surprised to find Seven staring blankly at the terrain map on the workstation display. She was even more surprised when Seven sighed wistfully as she traced her Borg enhanced finger along her cheekbone. Kathryn was riveted to her spot as she watched Seven's finger mimic the exact path her own finger had followed just the night before. Tapping into her command training, Kathryn deliberately refocused her attention and added the small cargo container with her personal belongings to the transporter pad. She took a deep breath, and then approached the workstation slowly to not startle Seven.

"Captain. My apologies, I was not aware you had arrived. I was reviewing the planet's most recent weather projections to ascertain if there were any changes in the last 6.5 hours." Seven quickly re-focused her attention to the data in front of her.

"It's okay Seven. You seemed a little preoccupied. Is everything alright?"

“I am functioning within nor… I am fine Captain.” Attempting to validate what she heard from the captain the night before, Seven continued. “My regeneration cycle was interrupted last night so I find myself a little ‘tired’ today. I assure you that it will not compromise the mining efforts.” Seven watched the captain carefully, looking for any hint of evidence to verify what she recalled from the previous evening.

Kathryn’s command mask slipped, if only for a moment. Her eyes showed a hint of alarm before she turned away from Seven to busy herself with something in her cargo container. When Kathryn finished and turned back around, the look was gone. “Well Seven, perhaps you should have B’Elanna run a diagnostic on your alcove when we return. It wouldn’t do Voyager any good to have our best astrometrics officer asleep on the job.” Kathryn did her best to calm down the pulse that was threatening to beat visibly above the collar of her uniform.

Unbeknownst to her, Seven was able to detect the 14.3 percent increase in her heart rate quite easily. She also made note of the captain’s dilated pupils and faster breathing. Accessing the information she retained from researching Voyager’s database on dating, Seven was confident in her assessment that the captain was trying to hide feelings of physical attraction.

Seven moved slowly around the workstation and approached Kathryn. She locked eyes with the captain and stopped just outside the captain’s personal space, her hands clasped behind her back. Kathryn was both excited to be this close to Seven, but also wary of showing signs of the arousal she was most definitely feeling. She knew that Seven’s enhanced senses could detect her increased pulse. She was also sure her cheeks were flushed and hoped Seven would not ask for an explanation on that, or comment on the increased pheromone levels she was trying hard to quell.

"Thank you for your concern Captain. My alcove is functioning within normal parameters. The interruption was minor and not unique. While I am regenerating I am superficially aware of crewmen entering and leaving the cargo bay. It does not interfere as I am able to 'tune out' crewmen who I have no interest in."

Kathryn looked concerned at Seven's statement, even though she made an effort to hide it. "So Seven, does that mean that you are aware of all the activity that transpires in the cargo bay while you are regenerating?" Kathryn tried to keep her voice inflection casual and curious, but the ex-Borg knew differently.

"Yes Captain. I am aware of all visitors on a subconscious level. The crewmen I deem unimportant to not warrant retention in my cortical node. The presence of visitors that I do *appreciate* is kept in my memory for accessibility when my regeneration cycle is complete." When the captain's eyes grew larger, Seven took a step forward and continued in a softer voice. "Captain, I *appreciate* your visits and find it comforting to know you are watching over me. While I cannot see or hear you, I am aware of your presence. You have no reason to be concerned. I will not divulge your secret." Seven's eyes shone brightly as she blushed slightly.

Smiling, Kathryn put her hand on Seven's shoulder and was about to say something when the doors to the transporter room opened.

B'Elanna was the first through the doorway at a brisk pace, followed closely by a very flushed and out of breath Tom Paris.

"Don't worry B'Elanna. The captain wouldn't begrudge you a few extra minutes to say goodbye. I am sure she will understand why we are late. Or… maybe, she won't. I bet it has been a long time since she got laid." Tom stopped in his tracks, his mouth wide open, when he came face-to-face with the captain. She did not look amused.

“Lieutenant Paris. Good morning. Nice of you to join us. Since you seem to be so ‘well rested’ perhaps an overnight duty shift in sickbay will keep you occupied while Lieutenant Torres is planet-side. I am sure the Doctor would appreciate the help with his routine inventory and cleaning of medical supplies.” Kathryn’s eyes had shaded to a dark gray as she regarded the visibly terrified officer.

B’Elanna was rooted to her spot as she watched Tom on the receiving end of the captain’s thinly veiled sarcasm. She was grateful it was Tom who the captain directed her anger at, and secretly glad he was getting put in his place. She told him they could not be late.

Seven was equally transfixed, her eyes wide as she evaluated the change in the captain’s voice and body language from what she displayed mere moments before. She was amazed at how her own body reacted to the deep and husky voice of a clearly unhappy Captain Janeway. It sent a chill through her that was not unpleasant, even if the change in the captain’s demeanor meant she was quite angry.

“Lieutenant Torres, do you have anything further to add about my private life?” The captain regarded her with the same glare, just a fraction less intense than she leveled at Tom. “Belay that, I don’t want to hear it.” Kathryn held up her hand in a gesture that spoke volumes silently.

B’Elanna stood frozen in place and gazed at the ground, hoping the storm would pass soon. When the captain turned to move to the transporter controls, B’Elanna and Tom let out the breath they were both holding. B’Elanna added her cargo container to the transporter pad with the rest of the away mission gear and stepped closer to Seven.

“Good morning Lieutenant Torres. I am curious about something. The captain’s use of the phrase ‘well rested’ previously seems incongruous with the increased heart rate and pheromone levels being exhibited by both you and Lieutenant Paris. I can only extrapolate that you had just finished the act of copulation. Is that why you were 7.2 minutes late?”

“Uh, yeah Seven. That is why I am late. I’m sorry Captain. I will not let it happen again.”

“See that you don’t Lieutenant. Now if we are ready to transport we can put this unpleasantness behind us.” The captain favored Tom with another warning look. “Lieutenant Paris, you are dismissed. Report to sickbay when your duty shift is over. The Doctor will be expecting you.” Kathryn gazed at B’Elanna and gave her a very slight half-smile.

B’Elanna took this as an opening to deliver a parting shot. “Hey flyboy, I had better not hear of you anywhere near either of the Delaney sisters while I am gone!”

Tom opened his mouth to respond when Kathryn repeated “Dismissed Lieutenant Paris, now.”

The captain moved to the workstation a short distance away. “Janeway to Commander Tuvok.”

“Tuvok here, how may I assist you Captain?”

“Please meet me in transporter room one. I have a last minute issue I need your help with. Janeway out.”

Tuvok arrived a very short time later, as requested. Janeway pulled him to the side so their conversation would be private. Of course with Seven's enhanced auditory ability, the contents of their conversation would only be private to B'Elanna.

"Tuvok, it seems that Lieutenant Paris has taken it upon himself to pass judgment on my private life in front of members of the senior staff. We both know Tom, which leads me to believe he is also gossiping in the mess hall, Sandrine's or anywhere else with an audience. I would *hate* to find out that my sex life is the topic of his betting pool de jour. Please see what you can do to put a stop to it. I have assigned him an overnight duty shift with the Doctor while we are on this away mission. Please inform the Doctor to be expecting his help with any task. I might recommend sanitizing the bio beds and cleaning the deck as a good start." Janeway favored Tuvok with a smile, knowing he understood exactly the type of extra work she had in mind for Tom.

"Very well Captain. I will see that Lieutenant Paris is most helpful in your absence. I will also be diligently monitoring the planet atmosphere and geological conditions since you are again leaving the ship without a security detail." Tuvok's slightly raised eyebrow was the one hint at the gentle reprimand only he could get away with. Much to Tuvok's chagrin, this would not be the first time the captain had ignored Section 12 of Starfleet Code, which recommended against the captain's participation in away missions.

Tuvok stepped over to the transporter controls and keyed in the coordinates for their beam in location. The majority of the mining equipment had already been transported planet-side. Within the slight blue light, the environmental habitat and personal cargo containers dematerialized from the transporter pad.

"Captain, the environmental habitat and cargo is waiting for you as the established coordinates. I am ready to transport you and your away team at your leisure." Tuvok stepped back from the controls and put his hands behind his back.

"Thank you my friend. Don't look so worried. I am sure we will be fine. We will be back soon, I promise. It will be like no time has passed. Come on ladies, the dilithium is waiting." The captain stepped up on the transporter pad and waited for Seven and B'Elanna to join her. As Kathryn felt the familiar tingles of the transporter beam engage, she was sure she heard Tuvok remind her that Vulcan's do not worry.

Chapter Four

"Captain's log, stardate 54717.4. Lieutenant Torres, Seven of Nine and I arrived slightly ahead of the rest of the mining team a little over two hours ago. Seven had identified a cave system in a rocky hillside as the preferred place to begin collecting the dilithium. I had Tuvok beam our environmental habitat and personal cargo directly to the coordinates for our base camp a little over 1.6 kilometers away from the mining site. While Seven and B'Elanna are overseeing their team's mining efforts, I am taking advantage of the warmth of this planet's primary sun while I set up our 'home away from home' for the next two days. I am really hoping this time away from the ship and the demands of their respective departments will give Seven and B'Elanna a bit of a break and a chance to interact on a more personal level. Tuvok is awaiting my hail to transport the meals I have pre-arranged. In the meantime, I brought along a book to read to pass the time. If I get bored with that, I may actually handwrite a letter home, for the one day I can actually deliver it."

Kathryn ended the log and sat back against the lone tree in her immediate area. Around her was a vast expanse of sand and rock formations circling a small lake. The rocks were a red color and very worn from centuries of abuse by the water and wind cycles of the planet. The lake, in contrast, was smooth as glass and the most vivid

green color Kathryn had ever seen. It was not green like organic life, but rather a deep jade color. A short distance from the gently sloping shoreline was a rocky island that was relatively flat on the top. Kathryn was regretting not studying the planet's terrain more prior to this mission. If she had realized there was a perfect swimming hole, she would have packed a bathing suit.

Kathryn had offered to assist Seven and B'Elanna with the dilithium but Seven insisted that she remain back at camp to enjoy the fresh air. With no pressing responsibilities, Kathryn took Seven up on the offer to remain and relax for a short time. It was a rare treat when a starship captain could get down time, so she readily took advantage of it.

A short distance from the water's edge, Kathryn prepared the environmental habitat that was beamed down prior to their arrival. This shelter for the next 48 hours was a cross between the more structured modular shelters and a lightweight nylon 'camping tent' reminiscent of old Earth. The frame sat atop a padded base and was tall enough for standing upright, with a temperature modulating fabric stretching over the sides and top. Inside, the space was divided into two main areas. A smaller common area to stow gear and supplies was to the right of the entrance. To the left, divided only by a thin curtain of fabric, was a larger area designated for sleeping. To make the experience feel even more like 'camping' any biological needs would have to be taken outside. Thankfully this would only apply to Kathryn and B'Elanna since Seven's biological needs were still processed by her abdominal implant. Kathryn did not think Seven would appreciate squatting behind a rock.

Inside the sleeping portion of the habitat Kathryn keyed the codes to inflate the three mattresses. They were arranged next to the outside walls of the shelter, end to end. Kathryn presumed she would have the middle mattress to keep some distance between B'Elanna and Seven. She could not help wonder if Seven would actually 'sleep' on the mattress next to hers or if she would stay up all night reviewing the mining reports on

her PADD. She did notice that Seven brought her portable regenerator, which could be used while lying prone. *'If I can't sleep with Seven, I can at least sleep next to her…'* Kathryn mused to herself.

The sun was nearing the high point of the day, with the temperature holding at a comfortable 23 degrees Celsius. Kathryn finished setting up their shelter and then changed into cooler clothes in anticipation of the increasing surface temperatures expected over the afternoon. Opening her small cargo container, Kathryn pulled out a pair of worn denim jeans and a white tank top.

After slipping out of her uniform and into her civilian attire, Kathryn grabbed her favorite red and gray plaid shirt and threw it over her shoulder. Just in case the sun became too intense later, she wanted to have coverage for her arms to avoid a sunburn. The doctor would never let her live it down if she had to utilize the med kit dermal regenerator to treat a very preventable burn. Pulling on socks and lacing up her old hiking boots, Kathryn grabbed her book and headed back to the only tree a short distance away.

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At 1300 hours B'Elanna and Seven made their way back to camp to have lunch with the captain. Seven had little need for solid nutrition this soon, and would have preferred to stay at the mining site with the rest of the team. Although the additional mining time would improve the efficiency of their efforts, the captain had informed her earlier that morning to plan on returning for lunch. Seven though a small portion of a ration bar would be sufficient. B'Elanna, on the other hand, was hoping the away team provisions included some real food. She was hungry enough to have a double portion of rokeg blood pie with a side of gagh.
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Seven was nearing their camp coordinates when she abruptly stopped in front of B'Elanna. Since B'Elanna's mind was occupied on her empty stomach, she nearly ran into the solid backside of the ex-Borg.

"Kahless Seven! A little warning next time you decide to freeze in your tracks please." B'Elanna got no reply so she looked around the side of her roadblock to see what had captured Seven's complete attention. Seven had not drawn her phaser so it was unlikely to be a threatening object in their path. What it was, to B'Elanna's surprise, was the captain.

In the clearing about 7 meters ahead was a very relaxed looking Captain Janeway. Seven had seen the captain out of uniform a few times before, but never looking so *casual*. Where the other civilian clothes consisted of linen slacks and a cream blouse or a semi-formal slip dress, today the captain looked as Seven had imagined her back on Earth, in Bloomington, on the farm she had described. Kathryn was sitting with her back against a narrow tree trunk, eyes closed, with her head tilted back with the afternoon sun illuminating her face. The rays of light turned her auburn hair the color of bright copper. She had a plaid button down shirt worn loose over a cotton tank top. To Seven's further surprise, Captain Janeway had even removed her footwear and socks, stretching her bare feet out in front of her. She was simply captivating.

B'Elanna had also never seen Kathryn looking every bit the traditionalist farm girl she knew the captain to be raised as. Honestly, before today, she had doubts as to that part of Janeway's upbringing. Looking at the captain now, the history she had read about Kathryn Janeway rang completely true.

Even more interesting to B'Elanna was the reaction from Seven at seeing the captain dressed this way. Seven still had not moved or said a word. B'Elanna stepped around Seven along the narrow path to get in front of the ex-Borg. Even then, Seven

maintained her fixed stare at the captain. B'Elanna turned back to look at her companion and saw clearly what she had been missing all along. Seven's facial expression was full of admiration and desire for the woman she was staring at a short distance away. B'Elanna kicked herself for not seeing it sooner. Seven had her first crush on the captain, and probably did not even realize it.

B'Elanna knew that teasing Seven about this would be cruel. She did not like Seven all that much, but remembering back to her first crush made B'Elanna feel almost sorry for her. She did not envy the captain one bit when it came to the eventuality of breaking Seven's heart.

The loud rumbling of B'Elanna's empty stomach broke Seven's focus. "So, Your Borgness, are we going to stand here staring all day or actually go get some food?" B'Elanna playfully poked Seven in the ribs and gave her a toothy smile. B'Elanna led the way with Seven following, somewhat tentatively, behind her.

Kathryn turned her head toward the direction of the footsteps that were approaching camp. She noted the determined look on B'Elanna's face and realized it must be meal time. Kathryn stood and laced her fingers behind her, arching backwards to for a good long stretch. In the form-fitting white tank top, this movement outlined the soft curves of Kathryn's breasts and gave a glimpse of the peachy abdominal flesh that peeked out when the hem of her shirt shifted slightly.

B'Elanna caught sight of the captain stretching like a cat in the sun. She was a bit surprised at how much more diminutive Kathryn Janeway was out of uniform. The broad shoulders that the crew depended on were as much a part of the uniform construction as the iron will of the captain who wore it. Out of uniform, Kathryn Janeway was much more petite… and very much a woman. B'Elanna caught herself looking, longer than she perhaps should, as the captain's soft features. She turned to glance

back at Seven, feeling sure that Seven was also quite mesmerized with the captain's newly unveiled female form.

Seven had taken a few steps forward behind B'Elanna towards camp. When she saw the captain stand and throw her head backwards as she rolled her shoulders, Seven was transfixed. Nothing could have prepared her for the jolt of electricity that ran from the center of her abdomen out to the tips of her fingers and back again. Seeing the captain's scoop neckline stretch tight across her chest made Seven's mouth go dry. She had never had the opportunity to see the creamy skin on the captain's chest, marked by a fine dusting of freckles that disappeared under the neckline of the shirt. When her eyes traveled down the captain's torso and stopped on the hint of flesh above the band of her jeans, Seven literally stopped breathing.

Kathryn stood straight again and pulled her top back down in place. She looked to the right to see both of her officers standing a short distance away. For reasons she could not explain, they were both stopped in place… just looking at her. "Welcome back. I assume you are here for lunch?"

B'Elanna was the first to continue forward, mumbling something about eating a whole Targ as she passed the captain and headed for the shelter. When Kathryn looked past her to Seven, she was still standing a short distance away. Her usually coiffed hair was in a bit of disarray with a few tendrils falling from the confines of the pin holding the golden locks in place. She had a faint smudge of dirt across her right cheekbone and her mouth was slightly open. Kathryn thought she must not be aware of the errant hair or dirt, since it fell short of her perfection standards. But it was Seven's eyes that caught the captain's complete attention. They were as big as saucers with a look of shock and wonder playing across them as Seven analyzed whatever new piece of information focused her thoughts. *'Oh my, she has never looked lovelier. I wonder what she would look like if I pulled the pin out and ran my hands through that silky hair…'*

Forgetting for a moment that she had a hungry Klingon in camp, Kathryn took a few steps towards Seven.

As Kathryn slowly advanced towards Seven, B'Elanna observed the exchange play out before her. Somehow her empty stomach took a backseat – momentarily – to the display in front of her. She watched the captain look directly at Seven as she closed the distance between them. When Seven realized the captain was heading in her direction, she involuntarily drew in a breath and licked her lower lip. This time it was the captain who paused in her tracks, captivated by the pink tip of Seven's tongue as it swept across her full bottom lip.

B'Elanna felt like she was watching an old fashioned tennis match. Her gaze kept switching back and forth between the two women as the air around them became charged with an energy that was almost tangible. She thought perhaps her earlier musings about Seven's first crush may be mistaken. From where she stood, it did not look like Seven's affection was one sided.

Seven moved forward to close the remaining distance between herself and the captain, stopping in front of the petite redhead. "Captain, it appears that you were successful in 'resting' this morning."

"Uh, yes Seven. Thank you again for the opportunity. I thought since I was off duty, I would change into more comfortable clothes. The Starfleet uniform is not made for napping under a tree."

"Indeed. I do find your attire quite… becoming on you. Your disposition appears more relaxed as well. Perhaps I will program a holodeck simulation of this environment so you can 'nap' under a tree more often." Seven's eyes twinkled as she arched her ocular implant at the thought of what napping with the captain would feel like.

“That is a good idea Seven. Then the crew could benefit from a new location for a recreational camping program. I think we all have tried the Earth Yosemite camping program at least once by now. Something different would be very welcome.”

“As long as you enjoy it captain, the effort will be worth it. I will begin programming the holodeck on my next off duty rotation.” Seven had every intention of continuing towards their tent, but the captain continued to stand there regarding her.

“So Seven, it looks like the morning’s mining was productive.” Kathryn took the final step toward Seven, well within her personal space. She reached up with her left hand to tuck a tendril of hair behind Seven’s ear. “You have a few escaped strands. There, now they will not be in your eyes.” Kathryn paused with her hand still in the air. Her eyes traveled from Seven’s eyes to the smudge of dirt on her cheek. She reached forward again to cup Seven’s cheek, the pad of her thumb rubbing the dirt gently off the alabaster skin. Her index finger lingered along the lower edge of the starburst implant as Seven leaned into her hand ever so slightly.

The captain was surprised at the rush of emotions that warred within her just from the contact with Seven’s skin. *‘If the feel of her cheek does this to me, I can’t imagine what it would be like to experience the feel of those full lips on…’* Kathryn drew in a shuddered breath and dropped her hand, not before noticing that Seven had closed her eyes.

B’Elanna took this as her cue to break up the sexual tension, wishing Tom was here so she could share the juicy details she just witnessed. Tom would also be useful to quell the arousal she felt just watching the captain and Seven together. “Ah… umm… so Captain. What are we having for lunch? I don’t know about Seven, but I am starving!”

Kathryn looked down at her bare feet in the sandy ground for a moment, and then raised just her eyes to look up at Seven through her fine brown lashes. “B’Elanna’s stomach calls.” With that, the spell was broken as Kathryn returned to the shelter area a short distance away.

Kathryn tapped her combadge hidden under the plaid shirt to open a hail. “Janeway to Tuvok.”

“Tuvok here Captain, how may I assist you?”

“Awek tersaya, please.” The captain communicated the Vulcan phrase she and Tuvok established long ago when Kathryn wanted their conversation to be private or on a secured channel.

“One moment Captain while I make the necessary adjustments.” Thirty seconds later Tuvok hailed again *“Go ahead Captain, we are status awek.”*

“Thank you Tuvok. We are ready for the first transport if you please.”

A moment later the familiar hum of the transporter beam materialized a container roughly 1.5 meters wide by 1.06 meters tall in the sandy space next to the tent.

“Captain, I took the liberty of making a few additions to the items you requested. I also feel compelled to advise you that I am monitoring the electrical storm in the northern hemisphere of the planet. I will advise you of any relevant changes.”

“Th'i-oxalra Tuvok. I will contact you again in a few hours. Janeway out.”

“Wow Captain. When I said I was hungry enough to eat a Targ, I did not expect you to have a full size one sent.” B’Elanna shot the captain a teasing grin as she keyed in the commands on the keypad to unlock the large container.

Pulling away the side panel of the container revealed a wooden picnic table, complete with a red and white checkered fabric covering. Atop the table was a handled basket filled with various size stasis containers. B’Elanna’s mouth was literally watering.

“Seven, you gotta’ come see this. It is a real picnic.” B’Elanna gestured for Seven to join her in unpacking the various food and drink containers. “Is this macaroni salad Captain?”

Kathryn chuckled, amused at B’Elanna’s excitement over the simplest of foods. “Yes B’Elanna. You will also find grilled chicken, watermelon wedges, and corn on the cob. It would appear that Commander Tuvok though we might also enjoy iced Vulcan spice tea and some zilm’kach for dessert.”

Seven did not know what to make of all this new food, but though it must be a treat to have both the captain and B’Elanna so happy at the prospect of ingesting these dietary items. “Captain, what is corn on a ‘cob’? I have no knowledge of the grain Maize in this format.”

“Well Seven, it is an ear of sweet corn cut from the stalk and cooked until the kernels are tender. It is eaten by holding it in your hands as you bite the kernels from the center core.”

B’Elanna had the plates set out and the stasis lids off the food by the time the captain was done with her explanation. “C’mon, sit down. Let’s eat!” It was clear that B’Elanna

could not wait to dig into the pile of chicken and macaroni salad she had put on her plate. The others joined her immediately, hoping to appease the hungry Klingon.

"Captain…" Seven began tentatively. "I do not require this much solid nutrition. I would be agreeable to eat a portion of a ration bar rather than attempt to eat your cob of corn."

"Nonsense Seven." Kathryn was already placing a small piece of chicken and some macaroni salad on her plate. She included the smallest piece of corn and began to liberally coat it with butter. When Kathryn set the plate on the table, she caught Seven watching her intently. That warm sensation began to course through her veins yet again. In an attempt to refocus, Kathryn filled her own plate with chicken, corn and fruit.

When Kathryn and Seven reached for a fork at the same time, their hands brushed together. Seven took a hold of the fork first, while Kathryn's hand lingered over hers in a most pleasant way. She looked sideways at the captain and arched her optical implant, causing the captain's face to flush and her pulse to increase by 6 percent. Kathryn pulled her hand away, her palm still tingling from the feeling of Seven's metal lined hand under hers. Seven was pleased to find the captain was not repulsed by her non-human hand. Seven took a tentative bite of the macaroni salad and deemed it acceptable. She put the fork back down and turned to look at the captain sitting beside her.

"Captain, will you please demonstrate how to eat this corn without use of a utensil? I am unsure of the correct way to hold the food."

Kathryn picked up her own ear of corn with both hands and brought it to her lips. Seven watched in wonder as the captain's thin burgundy colored lips parted so her teeth could bite into the kernels of corn. She was equally amazed at the skill with which the captain turned the corn to eat it in a circular pattern. Seven never thought the act of consuming

solid nutrition could be so visually stimulating. The combination of the captain's long elegant fingers twirling the corn, coupled with the way her lips moved across the kernels, made her draw in a deep breath through parted lips.

When the captain returned the ear of corn to her plate, Seven noticed a fine layer of butter had pooled in the corner of the captain's mouth and under her bottom lip. Without thinking, she reached for the captain's mouth with her right index finger and gently wiped the butter that was threatening to drip down the captain's chin. She brought her finger to her own mouth and licked the butter off the tip of her finger, not breaking eye contact with the captain. "I do believe I *like* the flavor of this buttered corn. Thank you for showing me how to ingest this new food."

B'Elanna was already on her second helping of chicken, after finishing a whole bowl of zilm'kach and a few pieces of watermelon. Now that her immediate hunger was sated she turned her attention across the table, just in time to catch the subtly erotic exchange between the captain and Seven. She was secretly glad now to have been assigned to this away mission. The entertainment factor alone was worth the inconvenience.

Chapter Five

"Captain's personal log, supplemental. Seven and B'Elanna returned to the dilithium mining site after lunch. I sent them back with the rest of the fruit and a few canisters of Tuvok's iced tea. Part of me feels bad for the crewmen who remained at the site, but I do not regret having a private lunch with Seven… and B'Elanna. I am finding it increasingly difficult to keep my emotions in check around Seven. Sometimes I feel as if she is intentionally flirting with me. I seriously doubt the Doctor's social lessons

included a segment on how to flirt with your superior officer. The way she arches that Borg eyebrow in a subtle challenge is damn sexy. It must be the fresh air, making me feel more alive than I have in years. I am drawn to her in a very physical way, which both excites and terrifies me at the same time. I am sure that once I am back on the bridge, with the weight of four pips on my collar, I will be able to bury these feelings again. The problem is, I am doubting whether I really want to…"

Kathryn paused the PADD's recording as she looked out to the lake in the distance from her seat at the picnic table. The water was clear and smooth, polar opposite from the muddled and turbulent emotions warring in her head. "Computer end log. Encryption code Janeway-Theta-524."

Kathryn was feeling a bit flushed. The planet's temperature had increased to 34 degrees Celsius by the middle of the afternoon. Somehow Kathryn doubted she could blame it completely on the warmer weather. She kept replaying events of the past several hours in her head, which did nothing to temper her inflamed desires. In an effort to cool down, Kathryn discarded her button down top by tossing it into the doorway of the shelter. She likewise tossed her socks and boots, opting to continue to pad around barefoot in the warm sand.

Kathryn attempted to read more of her book, but even her favorite 'bodice-ripper' could not hold her attention. Her thoughts kept drifting to Seven.

Slamming the old-fashioned paperback on the table in frustration, Kathryn got up and walked to the water's edge. She rolled up the hems of her pant legs and put her feet tentatively into the green liquid. It felt wonderful. The water was cool on her overheated skin as it gently lapped at her ankles. Kathryn rolled the hems higher and waded in up to her knees. Her jeans were getting wet and uncomfortable, so Kathryn returned to the tent to grab a knife from the cargo container. She sliced an opening in each pant leg

slightly above the knee and proceeded to tear off the legs of the jeans. Returning to the water in her newly fashioned cut-offs, Kathryn again let her thoughts wander back to the woman who occupied her head and heart. *'I wonder if Seven would think this is an inefficient use of time, or if she would enjoy the experience? I know I would enjoy seeing her in a swimsuit…'* Kathryn silently cursed her over-excited libido once again.

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After another 45 minutes of wading in the water, Kathryn was no more settled than she felt previously. Keeping to the shallows along the shoreline, she had wandered a short distance away from the shelter around the edge of the lake. She found herself seriously considering the implications of a personal relationship with Seven. All the arguments against it were still the same. Although there was no explicit Starfleet protocol about fraternization with a crew member, it was clearly understood that captain refrain from and intimate relationship with someone they served with. The captain was expected to put their own needs behind the needs of the ship and crew they commanded. A personal relationship would always be third – or fourth – on the priority list behind the crew and the ship. She could not see any scenario where this would be fair to her partner. Seven, more than anyone, deserved so much more than a set-in-her-ways and preoccupied old Starship captain.

On the other hand, Kathryn surmised, her situation was far from representative of a normal starship captain. The Caretaker's Array had stranded the crew decades from the safety – and rules – of the Federation. This journey through the Delta Quadrant was all about survival and creating a fulfilling life along the way. Realistically it would be half of her lifetime before the opportunity for an intimate relationship with someone outside of Voyager's crew would be possible. *'Even if you were home today Katie, you would still want to be with her. Admit it, Seven is the only one you would ever allow to get*
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behind your self-imposed walls.' Kathryn had to concede that Phoebe's voice of reason had made a crack in the armor she kept around her head and heart.

Picking up a small rock from the shoreline behind her, Kathryn skipped it across the water. The line of circular interruptions on the surface looked so inviting. Looking back towards camp, Kathryn made an impulsive decision, one that Captain Janeway would have frowned on. Kathryn, the woman, needed a distraction from her own internal dialogue. She tapped her combadge to open a hail. "Janeway to Tuvok."

"Tuvok here Captain. I was not anticipating your next transport request for another three hours. Are you in need of something further?"

"No Tuvok. I wanted to advise you that I would be out of comm range for the next 30 minutes. I know you may not 'worry' but I did not want to cause you undue concern. I will be going for a swim."

"Very well Captain. You have served with me long enough to accurately anticipate my unfavorable opinion of your course of action. Likewise, I have served with you long enough to know you will not alter your decision. I would, however, make me 'feel' better if you would hail me again when you have concluded your swim."

Kathryn chuckled out loud at the visual of Tuvok's facial expression as he finished scolding her in his uniquely Vulcan way. "Yes, my friend. I will check in with you shortly. Janeway out."

Wading back to shore, she approached a large rock near the shoreline. Kathryn pulled her tank top and bra over her head and slipped out of her shorts and underwear. With her combadge still attached to her top, she discarding her clothes in a pile on the rock and turned to slowly walk out deeper into the jade water.

Kathryn could not remember the last time she went skinny-dipping, as her mother called it. She came close once, cave diving on Mars, but this was truly the first time she was completely unencumbered as the water level rose higher up her legs to her hips and then her waist. She let out an involuntary shudder as the cool liquid reached the tender skin of her ribs and breasts. Her nipples pebbled instantly in the brisk water, sending a tingling sensation down her stomach to settle between her legs. She took a deep breath and then ducked under the surface, enjoying the cool sensation on her scalp as she pushed off with her feet to glide through the green expanse. The feeling of the water surrounding every part of her body was exhilarating.

Deciding to venture a bit further, Kathryn headed in the direction of the rock island in the center of the lake. By her estimation it was about 45 meters away from the shore. Once she crossed the distance, she pulled herself up on the rocks and laid on the warm surface with her face exposed to the sun. The warmth of the stone on her back side, coupled with the gentle breeze on the water droplets scattered along her front, made every inch of her skin quiver. She closed her eyes as her thoughts wandered – again – to Seven, wondering if she would also enjoy the sensation of water beads gliding across her skin.

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It had only been three hours since Seven and B'Elanna returned to the caves and the continued mining efforts. In those hours, Seven had found her thoughts drifting back to the captain more than eleven times. She was powerless to stop herself from replaying, in specific detail, each moment of her lunch with the captain. Where she first thought that perhaps she was imagining the more intimate interactions with the captain, the events that transpired over lunch proved otherwise. The captain had never been this *personal* with her before, on the ship. Seven surmised that the captain had allowed
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herself permission to relax her own protocols since she was off duty. This more relaxed captain had certainly been intently focused on touching Seven, something she very much enjoyed. Seven noted to herself that a holodeck recreation of this environment would be one way to re-live these experiences, if the captain would allow herself to relax in the same manner once they were back on Voyager.

Lost in her own thoughts, Seven was not mindful of her footing and stumbled against a jagged cave wall. Reaching out her human hand to steady herself, she cut the palm of her right hand along a rough protrusion. She was bleeding more than she realized when she heard Crewman Thompson call out of B'Elanna for help.

"Kahless Seven, you have sliced your hand open! Guess this is what happens when your thoughts are *clearly elsewhere*. Let me grab a bandage to stop the bleeding until we can get a dermal regenerator. Are you okay to stay planet-side or do you want to transport to sickbay?"

"I am functioning adequately to remain Lieutenant Torres. My nanoprobes are already repairing the damage. I do not require the aid of the Doctor at this time."

B'Elanna sighed. Seven was as stubborn as she was, so she understood the ex-Borg's desire to avoid a reprimand from the Doctor. Plus she had a hunch that Seven would not want to miss spending more time with their captain. "Fine Seven. We only have one more hour and I have things covered here. I will stay until the team transports back at the end of the shift. Why don't you go back to the shelter and mend your hand. There is a dermal regenerator in the emergency med kit. I am *sure* the captain would be more than happy to help you get fixed up. I will hike back for dinner once the away team returns to the ship." B'Elanna put her hand on Seven's shoulder in a friendly gesture, and then turned her around with a little nudge in the direction of the exit.

At the mention of the captain, Seven's eyes lit up although her voice remained clipped. "I will comply." Seven continued up the path back to the cave entrance, but not before turning to favor B'Elanna with a slightly knowing smile.

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Seven made her way back to camp with images of the captain occupying most of her thoughts. She had slowed the bleeding in her hand considerably, but the bandage had soaked through and dripped a good deal of blood on the sleeve of her biosuit. This inconsequential detail went unnoticed by Seven since she had packed her plum biosuit in the event the blue one she currently wore became soiled from the mining efforts.

When she arrived back at camp, Seven found the captain's discarded shirt and footwear just inside the doorway. She took a moment to put the shoes and socks near the captain's cargo container. Picking up the plaid shirt, Seven brought it to her nose and inhaled deeply. She could not find a logical reason for her actions, yet her desire to breathe in the unique scent of the captain was too compelling to resist. It still had the faint smell of the captain's shampoo mixed with a bit of sandalwood and lavender. To Seven, it was an intoxicating aroma that caused her stomach to flutter.

Remembering why she was there, Seven put the captain's shirt with the other items and went about repairing the gash in her hand. She did not want the captain to worry about her, and since her nanoprobes had already eliminated any infection risk the only step left was closing up the skin. With her newly pink skin healed, Seven headed out of the tent to go find the captain.

Seven did not see the captain at the table when she had arrived, so she went around the side of the tent towards the lone tree in the area. Secretly she hoped to have a chance to watch the captain 'napping' for a few minutes first. She was very much
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looking forward to seeing the captain again in her jeans and tank top. When Seven got within eyesight of the tree, the captain was nowhere to be found.

A sense of concern began to overtake Seven as she looked around for the captain. She continued around the edge of the lake for another 0.4 kilometers until she found the rock with the captain's clothes. Her hand went immediately to her combadge. "Seven of Nine to Commander Tuvok!"

"Tuvok here."

"Commander, I require your assistance. I have found the captain's discarded clothing and combadge, but I have yet to locate the captain. I am concerned for her safety. Will you please transport planet-side to assist in my efforts to locate her – urgently?" Seven's heart was beating frantically and there was no mistaking the fear in her voice.

Tuvok knew Seven's logical demeanor would be compromised when it came to the captain's safety. He regarded Seven as he did his own daughter and had formulated the opinion that Seven had developed very personal feelings for the captain. Now, hearing the panic in Seven's voice, his opinion was cemented.

"Seven, please remain calm. The captain has…"

"Commander, she is gone. I fear harm has come to her, I must…"

"Seven of Nine!" Tuvok's raised voice and even tone brought some order to Seven's thoughts. *"Seven, the captain is unharmed. She hailed me 23 minutes ago advising me that she was going to be swimming and away from her combadge. If you look out on the lake, you may see her swimming back to shore by now. If she has not returned in 7 minutes, please immediately hail me again."*

"Thank you Commander. I will wait here for her return." Seven did her best to calm her breathing, although her voice still had an edge of worry.

"I might add that since she is swimming without her clothing, it may be prudent to find something for the captain to cover up and dry off with. I would suggest the fabric cloth from the table I transported earlier. Tuvok out."

Seven went back the short distance to the picnic table and removed the checkered cloth covering. As she returned to the rock to await the captain's return, Tuvok's words replayed in her head. She drew in an involuntary gasp when she realized the captain would be returning nude.

Chapter Six

The captain felt warm and dry and completely relaxed as she opened her eyes to the afternoon sun overhead. She had allowed herself a few minutes to daydream about Seven. Her thoughts had been filled with images from her many memories and fantasies. Seven's frustration at losing Velocity, her hair falling in sweaty tendrils around her face. Seven's wonder at the texture of the modeling clay in the Da Vinci Studio program. Seven's damp skin after a warm bath as she treated her to a back rub...

Kathryn knew she had to head back to shore, or else Tuvok would have an entire security team beamed down to their location. That was something to be avoided at all costs. Standing up and stretching, Kathryn moved closer to the far edge of the rock and dipped her toes in the smooth surface before lowering herself to splash water back on

herself. It would feel a bit cool on her warm skin, but she had no alternative other than to swim back. As she turned and looked towards the direction of her clothing, she froze. Although it was a bit of a distance away, she was sure she saw Seven sitting on the rock where she had left her clothing. Kathryn had never been overly modest, but she knew that the ex-Borg's enhanced visual acuity likely meant that Seven could see her very clearly. This sent a rush of excitement and desire through Kathryn again, and made the water feel especially brisk as she entered in the water and swam for shore.

Seven had been scanning the surface of the water, looking for the captain swimming back to shore. She saw some movement out in the center of the lake, not remembering before now that she had identified a small rocky island in the distance. When she looked closer she saw the lovely, and completely naked, backside of Captain Janeway. Seven was in complete awe and could not pull her gaze away, as social etiquette would dictate. The captain was so much smaller than Seven had previously believed her to be. She had strong shoulders and a well-toned back which tapered down to a thin waist. Her posterior was slight and softly rounded above her strong legs. Seven had to consciously force herself to breathe, watching the captain as she dipped her foot in the water. She continued watching in wonder as the captain crouched near the island's edge and splashed her face with the cool green liquid. Then the captain stood and turned around.

Seven did not know if she should remain still and hope the captain did not catch her, or perhaps leave and go back to their tent until the captain returned. While her logical mind told her to retreat, her inflamed desires and the pounding of her heart compelled her to stay. She watched as the captain walked slowly to the edge of the rock, raised her hands over her head, and dove into the jade water. It had all happened quickly, but not before the sight of the captain's small round breasts, flat stomach, and thatch of coarse auburn hair were seared into her eidetic memory.

The force of these feelings, these *sensations*, was relatively new to Seven. She felt small beads of perspiration settling along her hairline, a peculiar feeling since her nanoprobes usually maintained her core body temperature at a steady level. Her fingers tingled and her mouth was dry. There was a pulsating in her lower abdomen and a fluttering between her legs. She pressed her legs together involuntarily, which only increased this feeling. Seven had experienced these feelings, these desires, previously but at a much lower intensity when she found herself alone with the captain. In the solitude of the cargo bay, she felt these desires to a larger degree when she thought about the captain in a more intimate manner. Now these sensations were threatening to overwhelm her as the object of her desires was swimming directly toward her.

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As Kathryn neared the shore, a moment of anxiety caused her to stop and tread water. She was close enough to see Seven watching her intently. She wondered if Seven was going to remain there, watching her as she walked out of the lake. The thought of walking toward Seven, completely nude, was something straight out of one of Kathryn's late night fantasies. The water added an interesting element to the impending scenario as she was sure the cool breeze would cause her nipples to harden immediately. In her fantasy Seven would cover her pebbled nipple with a warm wet tongue. *'Focus Katie. You don't want to scare her off. You don't even know for sure she is attracted to you…'* Phoebe's voice in her head brought Kathryn's thoughts back to her immediate surroundings as she decided to continue swimming to shore.

When Kathryn reached a point where she could easily stand, she remained low in the water for a minute. The internal argument within her head had finally stopped when she forced herself to accept the truth that was right in front of her. *'It's now or never. I guess I will finally find out if Seven sees me as more than a mentor and friend.'* With that, she
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turned to dip her head backwards in the water so her hair would be slicked back off her face. The last thing she wanted was wet hair in her eyes as she gauged Seven's reaction.

Seven watched as the captain ceased swimming and stood in the water, which hit her at about shoulder level. It would not be logical to bring the fabric out to the captain as it would become wet and defeat the purpose of providing a dry covering. She had no other choice but to wait for the captain to exit the lake. Her heart was beating erratically and her human hand was trembling.

The captain took a few tentative steps forward and locked eyes with Seven. She continued to hold Seven's gaze as she slowly, deliberately, walked out of the water. Kathryn half expected Seven to look away, perhaps even turn around. Kathryn was relieved when Seven remained still and held her stare. *'So far, so good Katie.'* Even as Kathryn's body emerged from the water, Seven did not break eye contact.

By the time the water level was at Kathryn's waist, Seven's gaze did slip. She could not stop herself from looking down at the captain's hard rosy nipples. Even though the glimpse was momentary, it did not go unnoticed by Kathryn. Seven's eyes found Kathryn's again and she blushed at being caught. Kathryn tilted her head to the side slightly and raised one eyebrow suggestively.

A few steps further had the water level down to Kathryn's hips. Seven eyes grew large as the captain took two more steps, bringing the water level down to her mid-thigh. The captain stopped and gave Seven a half grin, almost daring her to avert her eyes again. Seven looked down at the folded cloth in her lap and then slowly returned her gaze to the captain's face, allowing a lingering glance up the body that was inching even closer to her. When she met Kathryn's eyes again, it was Seven who arched her ocular implant as a faint grin spread across her lovely mouth.

As Kathryn took the final few steps out of the lake, Seven stood and walked gradually toward her as she unfolded the fabric in her hands. When they were face to face Seven stretched her arms to the each side and brought the cloth up between them. Kathryn placed her hands next to Seven's as she took hold of the fabric, neither of them moving an inch, as an electricity passed between them at the point of contact.

"Captain, you appeared cold. I thought you could wrap this around yourself to dry off prior to putting your clothing back on."

"Actually Seven, I am feeling quite *warm* right now. What made you think I was cold?" Kathryn looked up at Seven with smoldering eyes that were subtly challenging.

"Well Captain, when you ascended up the shore I observed that your nipples had hardened." Seven punctuated her comment with a sheepish grin.

Kathryn threw her head back and let out a husky laugh. "Precise as ever. So tell me Seven, did you like what you saw?" Kathryn held her breath, hoping she had not scared Seven with her directness.

Seven let go of the fabric they had both been holding and took a small step backwards. She clasped her hands behind her back, and looked down at the sand. Kathryn knew this was an automatic response when Seven was faced with something new or unsure, but she held still a moment longer. When she did not reply, Kathryn turned and wrapped the fabric around herself in an effort to hide the disappointment she could not keep from her face.

Kathryn was chastising herself as she tucked the end of the fabric under her arm. *'Well Katie, you blew it. You pushed too hard…'* Just then Kathryn sensed Seven move to

stand behind her, the feeling confirmed by the pressure of soft breasts against her back. She could feel Seven's warm breath on her neck.

Seven leaned down so her lips were a whisper from Kathryn's ear. "Yes Captain, I liked what I saw *very* much." Seven put her hands on Kathryn's upper arms to turn her around. She was afraid and excited at the same time to be standing this close to the captain.

As the captain lifted her face to gaze into Seven's, she was lost in the radiant crystal blue eyes that looked down at her. Seven's full peach lips were parted slightly and her breathing was shallow. This time is was Seven who raised her right hand to brush a wet strand of hair out of the captain's face. As Seven leaned in to close the distance, Kathryn's eyes grew suddenly wide.

"Seven! Your arm is covered in blood. What happened?" Kathryn, upon seeing the blood, immediately pulled back to examine Seven's human hand. She turned her hand over to twice to be sure there was no significant injury. In the process of inspecting Seven's hand, part of the fabric had slipped down to Kathryn's waist. The fact that she was standing there, topless, in Seven's personal space was lost on Kathryn until she could be sure Seven was alright.

The captain's state of undress was not lost on Seven though. She took the captain's hands in her own, insisting she was fine. "It was a minor laceration which I healed with the dermal regenerator. There is no cause for alarm Captain." Seven released the captain's hands and reached for the fabric, pulling it back up to cover the captain's breasts. "Until you noticed the dried blood, I had temporarily omitted it from recent memory."

“I’m sorry Seven, I was just frightened. You have become very important to me and the thought of you injured worries me. I’m just glad you are okay.” Kathryn took Seven’s right hand in hers and brought the palm up to her lips. “Another thing, when we are off duty and alone like this I would really like you to call me ‘Kathryn.’ You have seen me naked after all, and Captain sounds entirely too formal when I am standing topless in front of you.”

Seven’s face lit up as Kathryn’s lips brushed tenderly across her newly regenerated skin. “I will comply Capta… Kathryn.”

Seven and Kathryn locked eyes again as Seven leaned down, bringing her lips closer to Kathryn’s. Just as they were about to touch, the familiar hum of a transporter beam interrupted at the last possible moment.

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Tuvok looked a third time at the chronometer readout on his tactical station. The elapsed time since the captain’s earlier communication was now 33 minutes. It has been 10 minutes since Seven’s frantic hail. Tuvok decided he could wait no longer and went down to the lower level of the bridge to have a discreet conversation with Commander Chakotay.

“Commander, I need to transport planet-side for a short time. The Captain has requested my assistance with a personal matter. I anticipate my return will be prompt.”

Giving Chakotay no opportunity to inquire as to the nature of the captain’s request, he turned and exited the bridge. Once in the turbolift he opened a hail.

“Tuvok to Lieutenant Ayala.”
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"Ayala here, go ahead Commander."

"Please assemble a small security detail and meet me in transporter room one. Tuvok out."

Tuvok arrived in transporter room one just ahead of Ayala and his team of two. "Lieutenant, it is now seven minutes past the time the Captain was to hail me. I am beaming down to the surface to ensure of her safety and that of Lieutenant Torres and Seven of Nine. Please stand by here and be prepared to transport to my coordinates once I assess the situation."

Lieutenant Ayala regarded Tuvok skeptically, wondering why they were not all beaming down together. He knew of the long standing history between Tuvok and the Captain, so he relaxed his stance and trusted Tuvok's judgment in this situation. "I will hail you immediately. If there is a circumstance preventing me from doing so, please beam down after an elapsed time of 2 minutes. Understood Lieutenant?"

"Aye Commander. I will await your hail."

Tuvok keyed in the coordinates of the captain's combadge, stepped up to the transporter pad and gave the order to energize. As he dematerialized he reminded himself of the Human inclination for getting into trouble and added this situation to the growing list of times the captain's actions had caused him personal concern for her well-being.

As he re-materialized next to the rock on the lake shore, he immediately turned full circle to evaluate his surroundings. A few meters away, he found the Captain and

Seven in a very intimate embrace. He tapped his combadge to hail the Lieutenant. "Tuvok to Ayala. Stand down. The situation is under control. Tuvok out."

The captain and Seven had both turned in his direction upon hearing the transporter beam initialize. Kathryn was clutching the fabric covering tightly around herself as Seven stepped protectively in front of the half-naked captain to address Tuvok. "Commander, I apologize for being unpunctual in hailing you. I was temporarily distracted."

With a raised eyebrow, Tuvok regarded the captain and Seven for a moment. "I see that neither of you are in any danger. I would, however, caution you to be more timely in the future. I had a security team minutes away from transporting to these coordinates to help me locate our 'missing' officers."

Kathryn stepped forward around Seven to approach Tuvok. With one hand holding the fabric in place, she placed her other hand on his shoulder and leaned in close to him. "Thank you my friend. I am sorry for putting you in that situation. I did not anticipate the way my afternoon would unfold."

"Indeed Captain. I am gratified to see that you and Seven are finally recognizing the feelings you both have been trying to hide for so long. Would you like me to fabricate a 'reason' to have Lieutenant Torres return to the ship tonight so you and Seven can remain planet-side?" Tuvok's voice remained constant, but his eyes showed the faintest hint of teasing. It was only their long-standing friendship that allowed Kathryn to recognize the subtle shift.

Kathryn lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "Thank you Tuvok, but I think we will stick with the plan. This is all very new and I do not want to rush anything. Seven and I have plenty of time to explore this change in our relationship."

“Very well Captain. I will return to Voyager and await your hail for your evening meal. Tuvok to Voyager, one to beam out.”

When the blue light of the transporter beam faded out, Kathryn and Seven found themselves feeling a little awkward to be alone again. Now that they were not caught up in the passion of the moment, neither of them knew quite how to proceed. Sensing Seven’s hesitation, Kathryn returned to the ex-Borg and took her left hand. She was surprised at how warm the metal felt as she explored the different textures that mixed with Seven’s remaining skin.

“Seven, a lot has happened this afternoon. I don’t want you to feel pressured or rushed into anything. I think it is pretty clear that I am attracted to you and would like to have a closer relationship. I think you feel something for me too, but changing the nature of our friendship has to be something you are comfortable with. Being in a relationship with a Starfleet Captain would not be an easy task.”

“Capta… Kathryn. You are correct in that I too want to have a closer relationship with you. I am very attracted to you, and have been for quite some time. Seeing you today in such a sensual manner, merely cemented my desire to be with you in a romantic way.”

“You are such a sweet talker. So Seven, does that mean you wish to alter the parameters of our relationship?” Kathryn’s tone was teasing, but her eyes were dead serious as she awaited Seven’s reply.

Kathryn knew the answer before Seven said a word. The crystal blue eyes reflected back to her all the desire and devotion that Kathryn felt for this beautiful woman in front of her. Then a smile began to slowly appear on Seven’s face. Not the slight grin she seldom shared aboard the ship, but a full wide gorgeous smile.

“Yes Kathryn. I very much would like to alter the parameters of our relationship.”

As Kathryn lifted her face and moved in closer to Seven, their lips a mere whisper apart, the unmistakable voice of B’Elanna could be heard in the distance as she called out to her companions.

“Geez, not again!” Kathryn let out a very frustrated sigh. “Seven, it really wouldn’t do for B’Elanna to see the captain wrapped in a tablecloth next to a pile of discarded clothes. I would hate to give her anything new to gossip about. Will you please go distract her while I dress and meet you back at the tent?”

Kathryn was treated to a rare site as Seven’s facial expression turned into a full blown pout. She wanted nothing more than to reach up and capture that protruding lower lip with her own mouth, but this was not the time and that was not how she intended their first kiss to happen.

“I will comply. However I am looking forward to a time when we will not be subject to so many inopportune interruptions.” Seven reached out to cup Kathryn’s face one last time before venturing back in the direction of the shelter.

Chapter Seven

As B’Elanna neared the table in their camp area, Seven came quickly around the side of the shelter. B’Elanna thought Seven looked a bit flushed and wondered if she had perhaps interrupted something between Seven and the captain. “Hey Seven, how’s the

hand? Did you get the Captain to help you heal the cut?" Looking around, B'Elanna realized that the captain was not in the immediate area.

"My nanoprobes and the dermal regenerator have healed my hand. The Captain was not here when I returned so I took care of it myself. Commander Tuvok advised me that the Captain had gone for a swim."

B'Elanna looked at Seven skeptically, not able to imagine Captain Janeway slogging through the water in a pair of jeans. Her curiosity was over the top now, so she continued to dig for more information. "Oh, I didn't think to bring a swimsuit. I guess it is a good thing the Captain thought ahead to bring one. Do ex-Borgs swim? I bet the captain would have enjoyed it if you joined her…" B'Elanna grinned at Seven and raised her eyebrows questioningly.

Seven recognized the teasing and decided to play along. "It would be ineffective for my Borg implants to malfunction in water, but I cannot say that I have tried to swim previously. Moreover, I do not know any other ex-Borgs that have experienced 'swimming' therefore I cannot comment." B'Elanna's bark of laughter spurred Seven on. "As for the Captain, I do not believe she packed a swimsuit either."

Seven registered 4.3 seconds for B'Elanna to realize that the captain was swimming nude. The Klingon's eyes grew wide as she processed this piece of information.

"Wait. What? The captain is skinny-dipping in the lake? I don't believe it. The captain would never toss her clothes and combadge aside and just jump in the lake naked. She's the *Captain*."

A playful grin spread across Seven's face, causing B'Elanna to re-evaluate yet again the uptight exterior the ex-Borg typically displayed. It felt like the Ice Queen's façade

was melting at a fairly fast rate now. B'Elanna wondered if Seven was intentionally taunting her. As much as she hated to admit it, Seven did have a witty – albeit dry – sense of humor.

"You are mistaken Lieutenant. She did not 'toss' her clothing. She left them neatly on a rock next to the lake. Rather than having her attempt to dress while wet, I brought her the cloth from the table to wrap around herself as she exited the water. She is dressing now. I anticipate she will return shortly."

The open mouth and shocked expression on B'Elanna's face was enough to generate a full smile from the beautiful ex-Borg. After B'Elanna closed her mouth, she stepped closer to Seven and leaned in towards her. Her question was almost a whisper. "Do you mean to tell me you saw Captain Janeway skinny dipping? Kahless Seven! I can name a handful of people who would give their right arm to see that."

"Yes Lieutenant, I saw the captain without her clothing." Seven's reply was precise and formal. Then Seven did something B'Elanna thought was completely out of character – she leaned down and whispered quietly. "Tell me B'Elanna, are you one of the 'handful of people' who wishes to see the captain undressed?"

If Klingons could blush, B'Elanna was sure she her forehead ridges would have been a rosy red color. Just as she was about to reply, a slightly damp Captain Janeway rounded the corner of their tent.

Seven heard the captain's approach first, and was powerless to stop the smile from appearing on her face. B'Elanna turned around, flushed at Seven's question and the timing of the captain's appearance. Neither was prepared for what they saw.

Captain Janeway, the woman who faced down the Borg queen herself, looked nothing like the imposing figure in command red. Instead both Seven and B'Elanna were treated to a new visual of their captain, one where she looked very civilian and *very* attractive. The captain's feet and ankles were dusted with a fine layer of sand as she padded her way back into camp. Her legs were strong and muscular in the denim shorts she now wore, which were still clinging to her damp skin ever so slightly. The captain's torso was easily outlined in the white tank top and her arms were showing a smattering of freckles on the top of her shoulders. Seven gasped slightly when she realized the captain had decided to forgo her bra. B'Elanna coughed self-consciously as she took in the sight of the captain's nipples clearly visible in the clingy tank top. Kathryn stopped at the picnic table to deposit the damp tablecloth and bent forward to tousle her fingers through her wet hair.

"Kahless she's beautiful" B'Elanna muttered under her breath as she took hold of Seven's left arm. She had not intended for anyone to hear her and forgot about Seven's enhanced auditory ability. Seven covered B'Elanna's hand with her own and gave her a reassuring squeeze, much the same way Kathryn had done with her before. For that brief moment in time, former adversaries stood together sharing this very rare experience.

"Yes she is" was all Seven said. B'Elanna looked up at Seven and saw the unmistakable passion in her eyes. When the captain stood and flipped her hair back she gave Seven a knowing grin as her eyes filled with tenderness and longing. B'Elanna caught this exchange and felt a pang of jealousy towards the woman who so clearly captured the captain's heart.

With a bit of difficulty, Kathryn tapped in to some of her command training in an attempt to break the tension between the three of them. She knew the effect her appearance would have on Seven, but she did not expect to seize B'Elanna's attention so

completely. Kathryn retreated to the tent and found her plaid shirt. She threw it on over her tank top and put on her socks and boots. *'You'd better pull it together Katie. It is one thing to tease Seven, but don't make it too obvious for B'Elanna. You know she is dying to fire up the gossip mill.'* Kathryn admitted to herself that the voice of reason playing in her head was right. She needed to get herself under control and set some parameters before the rest of the evening got out of hand. She ran a brush through her still damp hair before venturing back outside to her waiting officers.

When Kathryn returned, Seven and B'Elanna were at the table discussing something in hushed tones. The conversation topic quickly changed to the results of the mining efforts that afternoon as soon as the captain was within earshot. The captain joined them at the table, sitting on the bench next to Seven but at a respectable distance. Seven was slightly disappointed in the distance the captain imposed, but understood that the change in their relationship would have to be reserved for private moments. Seven was pleased, however, to see that the captain had remained in her civilian attire rather than putting her uniform back on.

B'Elanna was the first to speak up, naturally the topic of food being her primary question.

"So Captain, what are your plans for us tonight? Lunch was really good so I can't wait to see what you have arranged for dinner."

"First things first. We are all off duty now, so I would like to drop the rank and titles for the time being. This is supposed to be a 'slumber party' after all. Second, you are both filthy and overdressed. Why don't you go change out of those uniforms and put on something more comfy. I will get to work on our dinner." Kathryn gave them both a smile while she watched them look at each other skeptically.

"So let me get this straight Captain. You are telling us we can call you 'Kathryn' while off duty? And you want us to go change clothes? That alone is a lot to take in." B'Elanna held her breath for a moment, as she awaited the confirmation from Kathryn.

"Yes *B'Elanna*, that is what I am saying. Tonight we can be on a first name basis. This will, of course, change once we are back on the ship and on duty. For tonight I want us to just be three friends sharing a nice evening. Now off with you, you too Seven." Kathryn stood and moved around the table to give B'Elanna a playful nudge toward the tent.

Seven remained seated, with a confused look on her face. "Capta… Kathryn. Please define 'comfy' as is relates to my attire. If you are meaning I should change into something comfortable, I have another biosuit that is less soiled. I had planned to change prior to regenerating. I deem my biosuits 'comfy' and I have no other items of apparel with me."

With B'Elanna away in the tent, Kathryn returned to the bench seat and sat close to Seven. She leaned close so their bodies were touching from their shoulders down along their hips. Under the table, their thighs were connected which sent tingling sensations through both of them. "I actually anticipated this, so I hope you don't mind that I brought a few things for you to try. I really want you to be able to let your hair down and relax. I trust you can be out of your biosuit for small portions of time. Or maybe even a whole *night*...?"

Seven felt the warmth of Kathryn's hand on her right thigh even as she asked the question. "Yes Kathryn, I am able to function for intermittent amounts of time out of my biosuit. Certainly for a whole *night* and part of the next *morning*." Seven was enjoying this flirtatious banter with Kathryn and glad she had further researched the Doctor's social lessons on dating.

“Good. As much as I would like to, I don’t think it is a good idea for me to help you change. Inside my cargo container are some gray knit pants and a blue button down shirt for you. In case you don’t want to go barefoot, I also replicated some slip on sandals. Go change your clothes and I will work on dinner.”

Seven stood up, already feeling the loss of contact with Kathryn, and turned toward the shelter. She knew Kathryn would be watching her retreat when she looked over her shoulder and smiled. “I will comply.”

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Inside the sleeping portion of the tent B’Elanna turned on the small hanging lighting unit which illuminated the area in a soft glow. She finished changing into a well-worn pair of black sweat pants and was pulling her thermal shirt over her head. When she finished, she slid the curtain to the side to join Seven in the main area of the shelter. “Whatchya looking for Seven?” B’Elanna saw that she was opening the captain’s cargo container and thought perhaps she would get an early piece of brownie.

“The Capta… Kathryn sent me in here to change into *comfy* clothes she packed for me. I feel trepidation at the idea of being without my biosuit. It is almost like I am more *exposed*. That is illogical, but I continue to have this feeling.” Seven looked at B’Elanna with a confused expression, making her seem even more Human.

“It does seem a bit odd Seven, since your biosuits have to be the most *revealing* thing I have even seen on a woman, outside of the bedroom. The pants and shirt look loose and comfortable, the opposite of tight and revealing.”
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Seven considered this, but remained unconvinced. “B’Elanna, I do not wear undergarments with my biosuits. Will this be a problem in these items of apparel?”

B’Elanna was reminded, again, that Seven was still very naïve to many of the life experiences she took for granted. “Nah, it will be okay Seven. You can go without the undergarments. It is just us girls after all.” B’Elanna gave her a wink and turned to leave, secretly wondering how Seven was going to look like braless in the blue shirt.

“Wait B’Elanna… please. I would like your advice on something.”

B’Elanna was a bit surprised at Seven’s request, but felt a new protectiveness of Seven as she started exploring these unfamiliar experiences. “Sure Seven, what can I help with?”

“Kathryn said something about ‘letting my hair down’ earlier. I do not know what she meant by that. Can you explain please?”

“Well,” B’Elanna began. “I think she meant that she wants you to unwind and not worry about duty for the night. I know she wants us to get to know each other better and is working pretty hard to make this fun for both of us. She even has Tuvok helping her with the food, for which I am grateful. Kathryn wants you to relax your guarded exterior a bit and allow yourself to enjoy these new experiences.”

“I do not believe my exterior is ‘guarded’ but I will try to be less constrained. It is hard to do this due to my Borg past. I will never be fully Human and able to ‘relax’ as you say.” Seven looked down at her left hand with the saddest eyes B’Elanna had ever seen.

“Well Your Borgness, let’s just try to have an enjoyable night. Kathryn has worked hard to make this an evening to remember. I have an idea, let’s take her comment literally.

That would be very Borg-like. How about you pull that pin out of your hair and let it down?" B'Elanna smiled a toothy grin at her own cleverness.

Seven eyed B'Elanna as she reached up behind her head and pulled out the single hairpin that held her golden locks tightly in place. She tilted her head and turned it back and forth to loosen the strands of hair from their confinement. B'Elanna was staring at her with wide eyes.

"Okay Ms. Klingon, is this acceptable?" Seven poked her in the shoulder to get her attention.

B'Elanna walked around the back of Seven and reached up to run her fingers through the fine golden locks. She worked out the last of the tangles as Seven's hair fell in a shiny sheet to rest at about shoulder level. "Seven, you are breathtaking. The captain is going to fall off of the bench when she sees you. Now get changed. I will wait outside. Maybe leave the top few buttons undone on that shirt. That ought to really put her over the edge. I don't want to miss her reaction for the world."

"B'Elanna, may I assume by your helpful actions and comments that you approve of my feelings for the Capta… Kathryn?"

"Before today, I would have been skeptical. Something has changed in your Seven. Maybe I was just not allowing myself to see it before, but you really do have a soft and sensitive side. You are not such an Ice Queen after all and you do really seem to care about Kathryn. At first I thought it was just your 'first crush' but I am starting to think the captain has feelings for you too."

Seven did not want to confirm B'Elanna's suspicions since she knew Kathryn would not want her personal life discussed. She gave B'Elanna a full smile, appreciating the rare

display of caring coming from her former adversary. Not wanting the space between them to get too uncomfortable, Seven gave B'Elanna a good nudge. "Remember Ms. Klingon. I may allow you to see a soft side of me, but I can still knock you to the deck one-handed!" With that, Seven gave her a playful smirk as she rotated around and began to unfasten her biosuit.

B'Elanna saw the flash of skin and instinctively turned away to leave the tent, but not before sneaking a peek at the creamy skin and muscled shoulders that were revealed by the biosuit falling to Seven's waist. She felt another pang of jealousy, this time for the woman who would get to touch that beautiful body.

Chapter Eight

"Captain's personal log, supplemental. Today I did something I never dreamed I would do. I initiated a relationship with a member of my crew. Today Seven of Nine and I admitted our long denied feelings for each other. It goes against everything I was told by my father, Admiral Paris, and every other Starfleet Captain I know. It is true there is no express rule forbidding it, and I understand our situation here in the Delta Quadrant is unique. I also recognize that it may be another 15 or more years before we are home. Until now I accepted that my personal happiness had to fall to the very bottom of the list. Being here, planet-side and away from the demands of Voyager, I have come to realize the importance of my own emotional happiness to balance the weight of leadership. I am confident I can still be the strong leader Voyager needs and be a partner to Seven at the same time. Although Seven and I have not yet taken our relationship to the next level – a physical level – I am sure that will happen in the not too distant future. I do care for her very much, so much that it scares me if I am being completely honest. I only hope she feels the same way for me. I believe she does.

I will have to answer for so many decisions made here in the Delta Quadrant that may not strictly adhere to Starfleet standards. I honestly hope that my choosing to be in a committed relationship is not something Starfleet will focus on when they will have so many other things to criticize me for."

Kathryn heard B'Elanna coming out of the tent and closed the recording. "Computer end log. Encryption code Janeway-Theta-524." She placed the PADD down on the table and walked over to the edge of the lake. The evening was getting cooler so she hugged her arms around her waist as she stared into the reflection of the setting sun.

B'Elanna saw the captain standing at the water side, seeming to be a million miles away with her own thoughts. She slowly approached Kathryn, concerned about startling her or intruding on a private moment. "Kathryn…?"

Kathryn turned as B'Elanna approached. "I'm sorry, I was lost in thought for a minute. I am guessing you are wondering about dinner?" Kathryn's half smile was not convincing.

"Well yes, I am curious about your 'slumber party' dinner." B'Elanna regarded Kathryn with concerned eyes. "I am also worried about you. I know… Starfleet Captains do not need to be fussed over. But you are also a woman who I think is struggling with something. I would like to help if I can. I promise to keep it between us… on my Klingon honor."

Kathryn reached out and put her hand on B'Elanna's shoulder. "I appreciate the offer, but for now I think I need to work a few things out on my own first." Kathryn wanted to believe that B'Elanna could keep her confidence, but her reputation as the ship gossip was almost a thing of legend. This new direction in her relationship with Seven was not

something she wanted to hear whispered throughout the lower decks or mess hall. She certainly did not want to provide Tom any additional material for his betting pools.

Kathryn wanted to redirect the conversation away from her personal life. “I wonder what is keeping Seven. Surely she can handle a shirt with a few buttons.” She gave B’Elanna a half smile and turned to head back to the shelter area.

B’Elanna followed as they neared the picnic table. “I talked with her earlier and convinced her to try and relax for the evening. Fair warning though, you are about to get your socks knocked off. Remember that Seven can be very literal, and you did tell her to ‘let her hair down.’ Maybe you should sit.” B’Elanna winked at Kathryn as she took her own seat on the opposite side of the table, facing the tent.

Kathryn sat down, looking at B’Elanna skeptically across the table. B’Elanna eyes widened as she gazed over Kathryn’s shoulder to the shelter. She was literally speechless as her mouth hung open, her bushy eyebrows raised in disbelief. When Kathryn turned toward the tent, she really did have the wind knocked out of her as Seven stepped out of the entrance.

Seven was both surprised and pleased at the reaction she was getting from Kathryn and B’Elanna. Kathryn had rotated herself so she was seated facing Seven. It did look like Kathryn would fall to the sandy ground if she leaned any further forward on the wooden bench seat. B’Elanna sat silent, looking like a fish with her mouth open. Seven did not completely understand why her appearance was causing both women to suffer from temporary aphasia. She did opt to forgo the sandals so her feet were bare as she walked tentatively towards her two companions. It was an interesting sensation to feel the grains of sand between her toes. Seven made a mental note to ensure her holodeck recreation of this location included the green lake *and* the accompanying sand.

As Seven stepped closer, Kathryn blinked twice and began to take in the astounding beauty that was approaching her. Seven's feet were bare as she made her way through the sand. The gray pants were form-fitting, but not clingy like the biosuits, ending a few centimeters above her ankles. Peeking out from the bottom hem on her left leg was what looked like a thread of silver. Kathryn surmised that it was connected to another of her remaining Borg implants somewhere along her leg. The strand was curved slightly as it came down the back of her Achilles tendon and circled part of her ankle bone. Like her other implants, this one only added to her exotic beauty in Kathryn's eyes.

As Kathryn's gaze followed up Seven's long legs she noticed the bottom button of the shirt was undone. This gave her a glimpse of silver along Seven's stomach. The urge to trace the silver band above the elastic waist of Seven's pants literally made Kathryn's fingers tingle. Seven had buttoned the mid-section of the shirt, but left the top two buttons undone as well. Kathryn's could not stop herself from biting her bottom lip as she took in the creamy skin of Seven's chest and the cleavage that disappeared into the shirt. When Seven paused and took a deep breath, the fabric of the shirt stretched tight across her breasts, outlining to Kathryn that she did not have on a bra. Seven's nipples were clearly visible just below the waterfall of golden hair that fell about her shoulders. The ocular implant above Seven's left eye was barely visible behind the soft waves of hair. The star shaped implant on her cheek peeked out as Seven nervously tucked a few strands of hair behind her right ear. *'Watch yourself Katie. You can't just run your hands through her hair, even if she is the most stunning woman you have ever seen…'*

It was a good thing Kathryn had her back to B'Elanna. Otherwise she would have seen the very un-captain-like look of pure desire on Kathryn's face. As much as B'Elanna tried, she could not stop staring at Seven either. She knew deep down that Seven was in love with their captain, and she strongly suspected that Kathryn's feelings were

mutual. There was no way she was going to get caught up in the middle of whatever was building between them, even if Seven was the most gorgeous woman she has even seen. B'Elanna was certainly reassessing her original opinion of the Ice Queen now.

Seven closed the remaining distance and stopped a few steps away from Kathryn. Assuming her 'at attention' stance with her hands behind her back, Seven looked down at Kathryn as a slow smile spread across her lips. This caused the already stretched cotton fabric to pull even more tightly across her chest. "I trust you deem these 'comfy' clothes acceptable Kathryn."

Kathryn stood slowly and took one step forward toward Seven, standing as close as possible without being in her personal space. "You look very lovely Seven. The blue compliments your eyes." Kathryn then took Seven's right hand and pulled it towards her. "Here, let me show you how to roll your sleeves. It will give you more freedom of movement."

Seven watched attentively as Kathryn's fingers expertly folded the cuff of her sleeve. She could not help drawing in a slight gasp when she felt those elegant fingers brush the tender skin of her inner arm. Kathryn was enjoying the reaction she evoked in Seven and continued to gently touch her skin as she rolled the sleeve two more times and then pushed it slightly toward her elbow.

As Kathryn shifted to roll the other sleeve, Seven pulled her hand back quickly and broke the eye contact she had been holding with Kathryn. Her eyes looked panicked as her gaze shifted to the ground. After a moment she looked back at Kathryn, her human eye blinking back the beginnings of a tear. "This is sufficient Kathryn. You do not need to roll the other sleeve. Leaving it down helps to cover the implant on my forearm and hand."

Kathryn knew Seven was sensitive about her remaining Borg implants, but she did not expect the extent of Seven's discomfort. In an effort to reassure Seven, Kathryn reached out and took her Borg-enhanced hand in her own as she reached up with her left hand to raise Seven's chin. Leaning close, her voice was almost a whisper. "Listen to me Seven. There is nothing wrong with your hand. It possesses great power and strength, which has saved my life on more than one occasion. I am grateful for your Borg-enhanced hand. Please don't feel ashamed of it. It is part of you, which makes it important to me." Kathryn turned Seven's hand over and began to trace the metallic lines with her other hand. She was surprised at the warmth emanating from the smooth metal.

Seven watched with rapt attention as Kathryn's fingers played across the back of her hand. "You have such lovely hands Kathryn. So human. Mine will never be lovely. One will always be Borg."

Seven was surprised as Kathryn looked over her shoulder and then turned her head back to lock eyes. She slowly and gently raised Seven's Borg-enhanced palm to her lips and gently brushed the skin, just as she had done with her human hand near the lake earlier. Kathryn parted her lips to let her warm tongue gently trace the line in Seven's palm, causing her nerve endings to pulsate with a very pleasurable electrical current. She then proceeded to roll the other sleeve and slide it sensually up to Seven's elbow.

Although B'Elanna could not see what was happening or hear what Kathryn was saying clearly, she suspected by the hushed tones that the conversation had become quite intimate. As a gentle breeze blew through camp, B'Elanna stood and spread the tablecloth back across the wooden surface. She let out a cough to get their attention. "I think we had better eat soon. It feels like it is going to get pretty cool in a little while."

Kathryn took a step backwards and turned around. “You are right B’Elanna. I’m going to put something warmer on while you two get ready for dinner. I hope you are hungry.”

Kathryn disappeared into the tent as B’Elanna came around the table to stand at Seven’s side. “You okay Seven? You look a bit flushed.” B’Elanna’s suspicions about Kathryn and Seven were growing with each passing minute, but she kept them to herself. “Here, help me set the table. I am dying to know what Kathryn has arranged for dinner.”

Inside the shelter Kathryn activated the lighting until and changed out of the cut off shorts and into her favorite Starfleet sweatpants. At this point in the evening there was no point in putting her bra back on, so the buttoned her plaid shirt over the white tank top to cut the chill of the breeze. Following Seven’s lead, she skipped the socks and boots as she exited the tent.

Kathryn made her way back to their picnic table. Tapping her combadge, she opened a hail. “Janeway to Tuvok.”

“Tuvok here, go ahead Captain.”

“We are ready for dinner if you would please initiate the transport I arranged. Are you surprising us with any additions this time?”

“Very well Captain. I will transport your evening meal down to the coordinates immediately. I have not added anything to your menu choices, but I am sending a personal heating device for your shelter. The planet’s weather is changing since the last scan and I anticipate much cooler temperatures overnight.”

"Anything we need to be worried about Commander? We are basically 'camping' after all. I am not very excited about the prospect of sleeping through a rain storm."

"At this point I do not see any precipitation in your geographic area. The electrical storm in the northern hemisphere seems to be losing strength and should not impact you. We are continuing to monitor the ion storm in this system, but there is no immediate danger to Voyager. I would, however, advise caution. Storms can be unpredictable. Please keep your combadges on through the night. We will be monitoring the situation overnight and will transport you out if there is an issue."

"Thank you Tuvok. I trust your judgment, as always. Janeway out."

Immediately after the hail closed, the hum of the transporter beam initiated. Looking over at B'Elanna, Kathryn could see the Klingon's mouth practically watering as she rubbed her hands together excitedly. Kathryn smiled as she marveled at the benefits of Klingon metabolism. B'Elanna could eat most men under the table and still remained fit and trim.

Kathryn opened the cargo container that materialized and began removing the stasis lids. "Just for you B'Elanna, I have arranged for a hearty meal that my mother often served. Spaghetti and meatballs. With that we also have Caesar salad and garlic bread. I also thought you may appreciate a few bottles of Warnog. Seven and I will be having something a bit lighter, a bottle of P'losie wine I picked up on DS9. I have been saving it for a special occasion."

B'Elanna was already piling her plate full of pasta and sauce by the time Kathryn had finished unloading the containers. She scooped up a forkful of noodles and brought them to her mouth, only to have the pile of pasta fall from the fork and splat back on her

plate. “Ghay’cha’ I don’t know how you keep this on the fork!” B’Elanna picked up her bottle of the Klingon alcoholic drink in frustration and took a hearty swig.

Kathryn had noticed Seven watching intently as B’Elanna struggled with the spaghetti. Sitting down with her own plate beside B’Elanna, Kathryn picked up her fork and demonstrated how to twirl the noodles into a manageable bite.

“Separate a few strands of noodles and begin twisting the fork in a circular motion. This will cause the noodles to wind around the fork so you can easily bite it.” B’Elanna stuck her fork in the middle of the pile of noodles and began twirling. When she had finished she shoved a very large bite of pasta into her mouth. Kathryn threw her head back and let out a hearty laugh. “Or you can do it that way and stuff your cheeks.”

B’Elanna tried to respond to the teasing, but her mouth was overfilled with noodles. Seven looked concerned at the site of B’Elanna struggling to swallow so much food at once. She looked across the table at Kathryn questioningly and watched as the captain’s graceful fingers twirled another bite. Her eyes followed the fork as it was raised to Kathryn’s lips. When she saw Kathryn’s mouth open and her lips close around the mouthful of food, she wondered for a second time how Kathryn made eating look so sensual.

Seven picked up her own fork and began to twist three noodles in the red sauce. She was pleased with herself for succeeding in the formation of a compact bite of pasta. As she brought it to her mouth, one of the noodle strands became untucked and swung down to hit her in the chin. Seven froze, not knowing what to do with the piece of food hanging haphazardly from her mouth.

Kathryn chuckled, thinking Seven looked adorable with red sauce on her chin. “It’s okay Seven, just slurp it up. Like this…” Kathryn pursed her lips together and sucked the slippery noodle into her mouth while Seven watched with wide eyes.

As she attempted to duplicate Kathryn’s method, the noodle once again hit Seven’s chin and deposited more red sauce. After swallowing the mouthful, Seven put her fork down abruptly. “This is an ineffective way to ingest this food.”

Kathryn stood and reached across the table with her right hand, her finger gently wiping the sauce off Seven’s chin. She then brought her finger to her own mouth and licked the sauce off the tip as she sat back down next to B’Elanna.

“Maybe Seven, but I am enjoying myself nonetheless.” Kathryn picked up her glass of wine and raised it to Seven in a mock salute, giving her a coy smile.

B’Elanna was busy on her second piece of garlic bread, but did manage to catch the gesture out of the corner of her eye. She was sure they were well on their way to becoming a couple, even if the captain would not admit it… just yet.

Chapter Nine

Dinner continued for the three women over the next hour. B’Elanna consumed two helpings of pasta and meatballs, three pieces of garlic bread and a good portion of salad. Seven, in contrast, had a few bites of spaghetti and nibbled on the bread. All three bottles of warnog were gone as B’Elanna sat back and wiped her mouth.

"Wow Kathryn. That was fantastic. When we return to the ship I want to program this meal into the replicator in my quarters."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. For dessert we have my mother's caramel fudge brownies. We can snack on those later in the tent." Kathryn poured herself another glass of wine and stood to move to the other side of the table.

"Seven, would you like any more wine? I know it inhibits your cortical implant in large quantities, but this is very light. It should not bother you." Kathryn watched Seven tip back her glass to drain the last sip before holding her glass out for a refill.

"I find the wine acceptable and would appreciate another small glass. Thank you Kathryn."

Kathryn finished refilling the glass and set the bottle down. She sat down next to Seven, facing outward toward the water. Seven swung her legs over the bench and rotated so she was facing the lake as well. They were seated close together, but not touching. Seven understood the need for distance while B'Elanna was nearby.

"The moon is lovely, don't you think Seven?" Kathryn continued to stare at the moon as it illuminated the jade water below.

Seven was watching the captain intently, unbeknownst to the fact that B'Elanna was watching her. "Yes, very lovely." Seven agreed without even looking toward the water.

B'Elanna stood and began to clear the dishes and gather the remaining food back into the cargo container. "Kathryn, since you *enjoyed* the water so much earlier, maybe you and Seven can take a stroll along the shore while I clean up." B'Elanna's eyes twinkled at the smile she received from Seven at her suggestion.

“I will comply. Kathryn… Would you like to take a walk?” Seven held out her hand to Kathryn in invitation.

Kathryn took her hand and smiled as she was pulled up from the bench. She knew she should drop Seven’s hand once she stood, but the sensations between them felt too good to stop. Knowing that B’Elanna was likely watching, Kathryn turned to look over her shoulder and shot the Klingon a pointed look of warning. She was not ready to open her heart to B’Elanna completely but hoped she could be trusted with keeping this tidbit of information to herself. B’Elanna smiled and dipped her chin in acknowledgment before returning to the leftovers in front of her.

Kathryn and Seven walked, hand in hand, along the lake shore for a few minutes until they found themselves in the same place they were earlier in the day. The scenery looked much different now. The sky was a dark indigo and dotted with stars. In the evening light the water surface was shaded a deep teal and the rocky hillsides looked darkly shadowed in the distance. The sand around them took on a rosy hue and the leaves on the lone tree twinkled white in the moonlight. Looking out at the lake, the rocky island in the middle of the lake jutted above the waterline slightly lower due to change in the tide. The planet’s primary moon sat low in the night sky and cast a sapphire glow all around.

The breeze was cool on their cheeks and the sand felt cold and damp on their bare feet. Kathryn shivered slightly and leaned into Seven for warmth. When Seven moved to stand behind her and put her arms around Kathryn’s waist, she felt like all was right in the Universe.

Kathryn leaned her head back against Seven and let out a wistful sigh. “Mmmm this feels nice Seven. I could stand here and watch the stars with you for hours. I love

looking at the stars from the ship, don't get me wrong. But there is something different about looking up at them from a planet."

"I agree Kathryn. I find the aesthetic quality of the stars more pleasing being beneath them rather than among them. This is especially true if I can share the experience with you in my arms."

Kathryn could not quell the feeling of desire that was rising in her as Seven held her closer. She could feel the warmth of Seven's breath on the side of her temple with every exhale. The gentle pressure of Seven's arms around her waist and the warmth of that lovely body pressed against hers was causing Kathryn's pulse to quicken. *'Easy Katie, you don't want to rush this. Let Seven set the pace…'* Kathryn knew her inner chaperone was correct, but she did not have to like it.

Seven felt Kathryn shiver slightly in the evening breeze coming off the water. This made her instinctively hold her closer, a feeling she very much enjoyed. Seven found herself surprised at how natural it felt to hold Kathryn in a protective embrace. She had thought about this very possibility many times before but often discarded the idea as unattainable. To be standing under the stars now, with the woman she cared deeply for, gave her a feeling of fulfillment. Previously Seven would have regarded the notion of love and physical affection inconsequential. Now all she wanted was more – more holding, more touching, more everything. The sensation of want and desire building in the very core of her body was threatening to overpower her self-control and intellectual sensibilities.

"Kathryn, I am experiencing a very strong desire to touch you. While I am enjoying holding you like this, it feels insufficient. Is this normal in human paring behavior?"

Kathryn turned to face Seven and looked at her with smoldering eyes. “Yes Seven, it is normal when two people are physically attracted to each other. I can tell you that I want to touch you too, but I don’t want to do anything to make you uncomfortable. Tell me, what you are feeling right now with me this close to you?”

“I feel the absence of your body against mine, which makes me want to hold you against me again.” Seven put her hands on Kathryn’s hips and pulled her close. “I am now curious to know what your lips would feel like against mine, but I fear my inexperience would make me an unsatisfactory partner for you.” Seven looked down into Kathryn’s eyes with an expression of vulnerability.

“Seven, you never need to worry about being ‘satisfactory’ in any capacity with me. You are more than satisfactory in absolutely every regard. Yes, your human experiences are more limited, but that only means that we can discover these new feelings together. As you know, most of my romantic parings have been with men, so this is fairly new for me as well.” Kathryn reached up to caress Seven’s cheek, hoping her touch would enhance the sincerity of her words. “Not every action needs to be planned and analyzed. Just relax and go with what you are feeling in the moment.”

“In this moment, I want to kiss you.” Seven slowly leaned toward Kathryn, their lips almost touching, while their eyes remained locked together. Seven could feel the warmth of Kathryn’s fingertips as they tangled through her hair to rest on the back of her neck. The sensation – the anticipation – of Kathryn’s touch sent her cortical node into overdrive.

“That is very good Seven, because I very much want to be kissed.” Kathryn closed the distance and brushed her lips against Seven’s, slowly and delicately. The desire coursing through her by the contact with Seven was intense. Never had she been this overwhelmed by a gentle kiss, but she reminded herself not to go too far too fast.

Seven found the softness of Kathryn's lips immensely pleasurable. She wanted nothing more than to freeze time and stay in this moment for the foreseeable future. The gentle way Kathryn's lips played across hers sent an electric current through her, causing a small moan to escape her lips. Kathryn took this as a sign that Seven was feeling equally aroused and put her arm around Seven's waist to pull her even closer. The bodies connected starting at thigh level and continued upward, until their breasts were pressed together, sending tingling sensations through them both. Parting her lips slightly, Kathryn let her tongue slide along Seven's full bottom lip. This sensation elicited another moan, this time escaping from Kathryn.

Mimicking Kathryn, Seven opened her mouth and let her tongue explore the texture of Kathryn's lips. When their tongues touched, neither of them was prepared for the explosion of desire that ran mutually through them. As Kathryn's tongue explored the warmth of Seven's mouth, Seven's right hand slid lower down the outside of Kathryn's leg. She brought her hand back to Kathryn's waist momentarily before tentatively stroking up the side of her ribs, stopping on the gentle curve of Kathryn's breast.

Kathryn's every nerve ending was on fire. The sensation of Seven's mouth coupled with the curiosity of her hand, caused Kathryn to deepen the kiss. Seven replied with equal fervor as the passion of their kiss escalated.

Purely out of necessity to breathe Kathryn pulled away first and drew in a cool deep breath. Her pulse was racing and her chest rising and falling with each breath. When Seven looked into the eyes of the petite redhead, she saw nothing but desire. There was no Command Mask shielding her feelings. There was no Captain, hiding behind Starfleet protocols. There, in Kathryn's eyes, was the completely open soul of the woman who was the center of her world.

“I trust that was adequate Kathryn?” Seven’s eyes were likewise filled with yearning, but also had a mischievous twinkle mixed in.

“Oh my darling, that was so much more than ‘adequate.’ If it were any more adequate I may pass out.” Kathryn pulled Seven’s mouth down to hers again in another searing kiss. This time it was Seven who was forced to pull back, not only for air but to keep her cortical node from overloading on the new and extreme sensory information she was accumulating.

“Kathryn, while I deem it very desirable to stay here kissing you under these stars, I fear B’Elanna will come looking for us soon. I do not believe we are ready to share this new aspect of our relationship yet. There is still much I need to understand about how this change will translate to our interactions once we are back aboard Voyager.”

“You are right Seven. We do need to discuss what this means to us as a couple and what it will mean when the crew discovers we are more than platonic friends.” Kathryn took one step backwards and turned to gaze out at the water.

Seven moved to stand behind her once again, this time bending her head to plant a series of gentle kisses along Kathryn’s neck between sentences. “Does this mean you are agreeable to maintaining our new relationship parameters once the ‘slumber party’ is over? I was fearful you would tell me that once we left the planet things would revert back to what they once were. I do not think I could tolerate pretending that I do not desire you any longer.”

“I can’t either Seven. I think we need to take it slow and see where these emotions go, but I do not plan to hide my feelings for you any longer. We must be discreet, for the time being, but I can’t pretend any more. I want to be with you Seven, now more than ever.” Kathryn turned and took Seven’s hand as they started to walk back to camp.

“Kathryn, there is much more I wish to do with you. If the sensations I experienced kissing you are any indication, I very much look forward to the time when I can feel the expanse of your skin against mine. For now, however, I will wait until the time is right and we are free of duty constraints and interruptions.”

“Oh Seven, you don’t know how many nights I have thought of just that. It will not be tonight, but soon darling. Soon we will spend many hours exploring each other and sharing these new experiences together. But for now, we need to return to camp.”

“I will comply.”

They continued to hold hands as they neared the shelter. Coming around the side of the tent, Seven started to let go of Kathryn’s hand. Much to her surprise, Kathryn held tight even as B’Elanna looked up from the PADD she was reading at the table.

“Well, the moonlight certainly agrees with you both” B’Elanna gave them both a toothy grin. “I don’t know about you two, but I could really go for those caramel brownies. Can we take this party inside for the night?”

Seven looked at Kathryn, who just smiled. “We will comply.”

Chapter Ten

Inside the shelter, Kathryn went to her cargo container to get the items she brought for her companions. “Okay ladies, in true ‘slumber party’ tradition I have replicated PJs for each of you to wear.”

Seven was the first to react with a puzzled expression. “Kathryn, please define the term ‘PJs’ as I have no reference to its meaning.”

Kathryn smiled, remembering that this – like so many other things – would be new to Seven. “It is a shortened form of the word ‘pajamas’ Seven. Pajamas are items of apparel typically worn to sleep in.”

B’Elanna looked at Kathryn with an indignant expression. “What’s wrong with my sweats? They are nice and warm, even if they are a bit worn out. I can sleep in these just fine.”

“Now B’Elanna, it wouldn’t be a party without fun sleepwear. I thought of you when I found these in the apparel database.” Kathryn tossed the Targ covered pants and soft green pullover to B’Elanna with a playful smile.

Seven looked quite confused. She could not understand the purpose of displaying the likeness of animals on sleepwear. She surmised that it must be a Klingon cultural reference and began to query her cortical processor. Finding no reference, Seven thought Kathryn must be incorporating something from B’Elanna’s past in her sleepwear design.

“Kathryn, I hope it is not your desire to have me wear sleepwear covered with Borg cubes and spheres.”

It took Kathryn a minute to make the connection before smiling sweetly at Seven. “No Seven, for you I brought PJs in your favorite color. If memory serves you did tell me that color was red.” Kathryn raised one eyebrow as she watched Seven identify the shared interaction she referred to. Seven’s smile was confirmation enough as Kathryn

handed her the silky sleepwear. “I need to attend to a human biological need, so I will go change outside while each of you dress in here. Then we can break open the dessert.”

Seven moved to the sleeping area of the shelter to change into her sleepwear, while B’Elanna stayed on the other side of the divider. B’Elanna was finished first and began to set up the portable heating unit to warm the inside of the tent.

“So… umm… those are some pretty nice PJs you have there Seven. They look really soft. I bet they feel nice against your skin. It is fun to be spoiled sometimes. You are a lucky lady.” B’Elanna waited anxiously for her to finish dressing on the other side of the divider. She was secretly hoping to get a peek at Seven in the silky outfit without Kathryn catching her.

Seven pushed aside the curtain and returned to the other side of the shelter. For the second time that evening, B’Elanna was at a loss for words as she took a step toward Seven. She ran her hand along the luxurious material covering Seven’s arm as she found her voice again. “Wow, the captain is gonna love this.” B’Elanna favored Seven with an impish smile and a raised eyebrow.

“I am glad the design is functional as well as aesthetically pleasing. I am enjoying the sensation the fabric leaves on my skin. I also like the subtle repetitive pattern disbursed throughout the material. My prior research in Voyager’s database on women’s sleepwear returned some results that were questionable. Tell me B’Elanna, why would one want to sleep in a leather corset?”

B’Elanna coughed nervously in surprise at the question and tried to keep her mind from drifting to visions of Seven in black leather. “Well Seven, those apparel items are not intended for sleeping. They are more for entertainment prior to sleeping and are often…

removed… prior to going to bed." B'Elanna regarded Seven curiously as she watched the ex-Borg's eyes widen in understanding.

"I believe I understand. They are for sexual arousal and enjoyment prior to copulating. Is that correct? Tell me, is this something that is common in human mating behavior? Do you think Kathryn would find a leather corset pleasing on me?"

B'Elanna did her best not to imagine Seven in a corset, but failed as her cheeks flushed at the thought. "Seven, I think you would look extremely attractive in something like that and I am sure Kathryn would think so as well. That is something you will have to ask her at some future point in time."

"Thank you B'Elanna. I appreciate the compliment. I also think Kathryn would look very pleasing in one of those items. Do you agree?"

As B'Elanna was stumbling over an answer, the object of their discussion entered the shelter. "What are you agreeing to B'Elanna? You look white as a ghost. It must be something good." Kathryn eyed both of her companions suspiciously.

"B'Elanna and I were discussing the differences in sleepwear. I was asking her if she thought…"

The embarrassed Klingon interrupted Seven before she could get the rest of the sentence out. "Enough about sleepwear. I was promised caramel brownies! C'mon Kathryn, time to stop holding out on us."

Seven was paying minimal attention to the exchange between the two, instead distracted completely by the look of Kathryn's peach satin sleep ensemble. The fabric looked shiny in the dim light of the shelter and fell in a soft sheet down the captain's

slender frame. Seven wanted nothing more than to reach out and touch the fabric that clung slightly to Kathryn's soft curves.

"I would never dream of hording the brownies to myself B'Elanna. Go ahead and pull them out. There is one tin in there specifically for you. I am going to grab a cup of coffee. Seven, do you want anything? I had Tuvok send along a thermos of hot chocolate as well as chamomile tea in case you wanted something warm to drink. I am guessing B'Elanna will choose the hot chocolate." Kathryn grinned in the direction of the stocky Klingon who already had most of her first brownie stuffed in her mouth.

"Thank you Kathryn, some tea would be acceptable." Seven waited while Kathryn poured a cup of tea from the thermos and brought it to her. When Kathryn approached her, Seven's pulse quickened as the robe Kathryn wore slipped off one shoulder slightly. This revealed a fine strap of material holding the matching night gown delicately over Kathryn's chest. Seven's desire to touch Kathryn has increased exponentially. She imagined the feel of the silky fabric in the palm of her hands as she cupped the small breasts that were clearly visible through the thin fabric.

Kathryn saw the look of desire wash over Seven's face and smiled. Seven would have no way of knowing that Kathryn was experiencing the very same sensations as she came closer to the beautiful woman in red who stood in front of her. Handing Seven the cup, their fingers touched and remained connected, giving them each a fluttering sensation emanating from the point of contact.

Seven raised her ocular implant in a silent question for which Kathryn whispered in answer. "I feel it too Seven. Soon, darling. Soon."

With a great deal of willpower, Kathryn turned away from Seven to address B'Elanna. "So, are you going to save any of those for us?" Kathryn made a show of snatching the

container from B'Elanna and retreating to the sleeping portion of the shelter, throwing both Seven and B'Elanna a half smile over her shoulder.

As B'Elanna followed the food, and the captain, to the other side of the tent Seven deactivated the light and collected the portable heater. Her Borg enhanced senses registered that the temperature had dropped to 11.6 degrees Celsius and the wind speed had increased. The heating unit would keep the trio warm through the night.

With the heater in the center of the small space, Kathryn and B'Elanna settled in to their temporary beds. Kathryn was already sitting on the middle bed on the west side of the shelter. B'Elanna took the bed on the south side of the shelter which left Seven the bed opposite.

B'Elanna took one of the small brownie tins to her bed and proceeded to dig in to her second piece. Kathryn had already brought one of the tins over to the corner where her bed connected with Seven's and placed it on the floor, along with her coffee thermos.

Kathryn was reviewing the mining report summary on a PADD as she brought the first bite of brownie to her mouth. Seven watched as Kathryn's lips closed around the confection and her eyes closed in a blissful response. "Oh Seven, you have no idea how much this reminds me of home. It is as if I have been transported back to my mother's kitchen on the farm." Her eyes took on a melancholy look as she let herself succumb to the memory of home. Shaking her head moments later, Kathryn returned her attention to the brownie in her hand and looked over to Seven.

"You really need to try this Seven. It is one of my favorite things in the Universe." Kathryn scooted to the edge of her mattress closest to corner where it met Seven's own mattress. Facing Seven, she brought the brownie to Seven's mouth and waited for her to bite it.

As Seven's lips closed around the brownie, she let out an involuntary moan as she swallowed the bite. "This is very pleasing Kathryn. I see why you enjoy it so much." She leaned forward for another bite as Kathryn watched her intently. This time some of the caramel filling spilled out to gather in the corner of Seven's mouth. Kathryn was tempted to lean forward and wipe the caramel away with her own lips, but thought better of it since B'Elanna was in the same room. Instead she wiped the errant bit of caramel with her finger and held it to Seven's lips, hoping Seven would lick it off. Seven understood the invitation and took Kathryn's finger into her mouth. The sensation of Seven's warm lips around her finger sent a shock wave of desire through Kathryn. When she felt Seven's tongue play around the tip of her finger, it took all of her command training not to push Seven down on the mattress right then and there.

In an attempt to quell the desire that was building in them both, Kathryn moved back to the center of her own mattress and changed the subject. A quick glance over at B'Elanna confirmed that she was focused on her own batch of brownies and was oblivious to the exchange that just played out.

"So Seven, do you need to connect to your portable regenerator or will you be able to sleep here?" Kathryn did her best to keep the rising desire out of her voice and eyes.

"I am not in need of regeneration tonight since I expelled minimal effort in the mining operation this afternoon. I will attempt to 'sleep' but if I am unable I will be content to watch over you and B'Elanna as you do. I find it would be a pleasurable experience for *me* to watch *you* sleep for a change." Seven's eyes twinkled with amusement as she was able to turn the tables on her captain.

Kathryn favored Seven with a knowing smile before looking over to B'Elanna. "Are you going to eat all of those tonight or save some for morning?" Kathryn could not help teasing the stocky Klingon, who did indeed have chocolate smudged on her face.

"Actually, that is a good idea. I bet they would be good with coffee." B'Elanna reluctantly closed the container and set it beside her bed. She did her best to stifle a yawn as the exertion of the day was clearly catching up with her. "Okay kids, don't stay up too late. I'm going to bed." She winked at her companions as she snuggled down into her bedding.

Seven was reminded of the earlier admonishment from Commander Tuvok. "B'Elanna, please be sure to keep your combadge on through the night. Commander Tuvok is monitoring a storm on the other side of the planet and requested we keep the combadges on our person. Kathryn, you should comply as well."

"As you wish. Good night Your Borgness" replied B'Elanna, who attached her combadge to her shirt and then rolled over to face the wall of the tent.

"Good night Ms. Klingon" came the response from Seven, accompanied by a shy grin.

Kathryn smiled at the banter between her two officers as she attached her combadge to her peach nightgown. "Thank you for the reminder Seven. We wouldn't want Tuvok to have to check on us again. I must say, I am glad to see you and B'Elanna are getting along better. I hope this newfound camaraderie will remain after we return to Voyager."

"I will endeavor to continue to 'get along' with B'Elanna Kathryn. I find her to be agreeable when she is not under so much stress. Perhaps you should mandate that she participates in camping holodeck programs frequently. Her staff would likely thank you." Seven smiled at her own playfulness, which made Kathryn adore her all the more.

“I heard that,” grumbled B’Elanna as she drifted off to sleep. The sound of Klingon snoring filled the tent soon thereafter.

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On Voyager’s bridge, Commander Tuvok remained at his tactical station well into the Gamma shift. He had been watching the climate patterns on the planet as well as monitoring the changes in the ion storm the ship avoided three days prior.

The electrical storm on the planet was moving toward the southern hemisphere and would impact the away team in 46 hours if the current calculations held. That would be plenty of time for the away team to conclude the mining efforts and return prior to the arrival of the storm. This did not cause the Vulcan undue concern in itself. The unpredictability of planetary storms was a factor as they did change frequently, thus warranting the monitoring into the overnight hours. Tuvok did not want to interrupt the captain at this late hour, so he would be personally monitoring the storm so he could wait until the last logical minute before extracting the away team, if necessary.

The piece of the equation that had the potential to be problematic was the change in the ion storm currently impacting the third sun in the Quaxar system. The system was quite large and the storm level was holding at level 5. Even though it was many light years away, Tuvok was still inclined to personally monitor the situation. If the ion storm’s intensity increased or changed direction, he would have to initiate an emergency beam-out of the away team in time for Voyager to jump to warp to avoid the impact. Voyager’s shields would be rendered ineffective on an ion storm greater than a level 7. He only hoped the captain heeded his earlier words and had her combadge on through the night.
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An hour later, Kathryn was still reviewing the data on her PADD and B'Elanna continued to slumber restlessly. Seven was not tired and had no need for regeneration for another 3.7 hours or more. Sitting on her own mattress, Seven made an effort to go over the planetary data on her own PADD. She was unsuccessful as her thoughts kept returning to Kathryn and the events that had unfolded during the last 24 hours.

She was surprised at how much had changed in that short amount of time. Inside of a day, Seven's most guarded desires were brought to light. She not only acknowledged the extent of her feelings for her captain, she was given the unexpected chance to act on them. Her eidetic memory recalled every detail of the day. From seeing Kathryn dressed in jeans to watching Kathryn eat, her reactions to Kathryn continued to coalesce into stronger and stronger feelings. Her emotional feelings for her captain were fused with an intense physical desire when she watched Kathryn walking toward her, completely nude and beautiful, earlier on the shore. Seven's already elevated physical responses to Kathryn were sent over the top when they shared their first kiss under the stars. Accessing all the available information in her cortical processor, she came to a conclusion. Love. She loved Kathryn. This brought a rosy hue to her cheeks as she raised her fingers to her lips in response to the memory of Kathryn's kisses. Seven could not help but wonder… did Kathryn love her the same way in return?

Kathryn had noticed the change in Seven's demeanor as she watched the beautiful ex-Borg trace the edges of her lower lip with two fingers. Seven did not realize she was being watched as her gaze remained fixed on the opposite wall of the tent. Kathryn took this opportunity to openly look into the face of the woman that occupied her dreams and fantasies. Seven's eyes were the most intense shade of blue, visible even in the soft light of the tent. Her hair fell in golden waves around her face and her ocular implant reflected the light, giving off a twinkling effect with her movements. Kathryn
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thought she never looked more beautiful. The juxtaposition of her rosy human skin against the shiny metal of her implants was truly stunning. Kathryn had seen plenty of beautiful females in her life, of different species, but the woman who sat adjacent to her now was by far the most spectacular creature she had ever laid eyes on.

Kathryn's heart swelled even as her body pulsed with desire for Seven. She had never felt this way before. Certainly not with Mark. Not even with Justin. With Seven she felt fulfilled. She felt complete. She felt… loved. *'Finally Katie! Finally you are figuring out what has been in front of you this whole time…'*

Kathryn had to admit that Phoebe's voice in her head was right. It was love. She was in love with Seven. This realization made her pulse race as she laid down under the covers of her own bed. She was on her side, watching Seven, when she saw the look of concern in Seven's eyes break her concentration.

"Kathryn, are you well? By my estimation your pulse rate has increased significantly." Seven reached out to touch Kathryn's head in the same way she had seen Samantha Wildman check Naomi for a fever.

"I am fine Seven. More than fine. My pulse is racing because my thoughts are occupied by you."

"My thoughts are occupied by you as well Kathryn." Seven withdrew her hand and likewise laid down on her mattress, atop the covers, with her head as close to Kathryn's as possible. She reached out and took Kathryn's hand and held it in her own. "I have spent the last 63.7 minutes analyzing my feelings for you and I can only come to one conclusion."

Kathryn stared intently into Seven's eyes, her heart pounding in her chest. "Oh… what conclusion is that Seven?" Kathryn held her breath as she waited for the answer. She felt Seven's hand tremble slightly as she drew in a deep breath through parted lips.

"Kathryn, I believe I am…"

Before Seven could get the last four words out, the emergency siren sounded on their combadges. Seven was the first on her feet, followed immediately by Kathryn and a groggy B'Elanna. "Tuvok to away team. There is a level 8 ion storm bearing down on Voyager. Prepare for emergency beam-out."

Chapter Eleven

Commander Tuvok's brows knit together as he studied the information on the display at his tactical station on the bridge. He had been tracking the ion storm as it abruptly changed course, completely bypassing the system's fourth sun. Voyager was at stationkeeping in orbit around the planet closest to Quaxar's fifth sun. Both the speed and intensity of the ion storm had increased, dictating an immediate retreat into safer space.

Tuvok tapped his combadge, opening a hail. "Tuvok to Commander Chakotay. Report to the bridge immediately." While he awaited the arrival of the commander, Tuvok hailed Ensign Kim.

"Ensign Kim, I require your assistance in transporter room one. We need to initiate an emergency beam-out of the Captain, Lieutenant Torres and Seven of Nine. Meet me there immediately."

As a groggy Chakotay stepped off the turbo lift, Tuvok paused to give him a quick briefing. “The ion storm has reached a threatening level. I have ordered an emergency beam-out of the away team. Ensign Kim is already on his way to the transporter room. I anticipate the edge of the storm will reach Voyager in approximately 7 minutes. Please be prepared to jump to warp once we have the away team back on board.”

As the doors to the turbolift closed behind Tuvok, Chakotay tapped his combadge. “Red alert. Lieutenant Paris to the bridge.” Chakotay knew Tom was in the middle of his double duty shift in sickbay, but he would need Voyager’s best pilot to steer their way clear of the storm.

In the transporter room, Ensign Kim was busy keying the coordinates of the away team’s combadges into the workstation. There was some planetary electrical interference, which he was quickly making adjustments for. The magnetic disruption from the approaching ion storm was another matter.

As the transporter room doors opened, Tuvok entered with the Vulcan equivalent of concern visible on his features. “Ensign Kim, do you have a lock on the Captain, Seven and Lieutenant Torres?”

“Not yet, I am boosting the containment beam to try and compensate for the storm interference.” Harry did his best to keep the worry from his eyes. “I almost had them before the signal became unstable.”

Tuvok moved to stand next to him at the transporter controls. “I need not remind you Ensign that time is of the utmost importance. We have less than 5 minutes to retrieve the away team and move Voyager a safe distance from the impending storm.”

“Aye Commander. I am doing my best.” Harry secretly prayed that would be enough.

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Standing in the middle of the tent, Kathryn tapped her combadge. “Janeway to Voyager. We are ready for transport.” Kathryn’s command mask was back in full force, which made Seven and B’Elanna anxious and relieved at the same time.

It was Chakotay’s voice that responded in fragmented words. *“Capta… we are try… best to… storm interference… stand by…”*

Kathryn saw the wide eyed look of fear that flashed across Seven’s features. Purely on instinct she reached out and took Seven’s left hand as the hum of the transporter initiated. The familiar tingling of dematerialization was a relief to Kathryn, as was the reassurance of Seven’s hand in hers. This relief was short lived as the transport was interrupted and the surroundings of their tent came back into view.

“Janeway to Voyager. Report.” There was no mistaking the concern in the authoritative tone of Kathryn’s voice.

“Hold on Captain. Can’t get a lock… containment field…” came Chakotay’s staccato reply.

Kathryn looked at her officers, her friends, in an attempt to reassure them. “I’m sure they will get us out in time.” She squeezed Seven’s hand once before hearing the hum of the transporter initialize again.

It was B’Elanna who had the last word, invoking the Klingon proverb as they dematerialized. “Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam.”
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The doors of the transporter room opened again, this time admitting a clearly worried First Officer. “Tuvok, where are they?”

Tuvok was reminded that humans are emotional beings and that this situation was one which would be considered highly emotionally charged. He kept his voice level and calm. “Ensign Kim has boosted the containment beam in an attempt to lock on to all three members of the away team. We will know if he was successful momentarily.”

Chakotay tapped his combadge. “Tom get ready. As soon as we have them take us out of here, warp 8.” His forehead tattoo twitched nervously as he waited for his three crewmembers to materialize.

All eyes turned to the transporter pad as the hum of the transporter beam sounded. The faint figures of the captain, Seven and B’Elanna were momentarily visible before they disappeared again. “I can’t seem to get a lock Commander. Attempting again.” Harry was sweating now, not even trying to hide his fear as the situation became dire.

“Tuvok to engineering. Divert all available power to the transporters.”

The transporter beam initialized for a third time as three figures started to materialize. Harry was relieved momentarily, before he found cause for alarm. Addressing Tuvok standing beside him, he voiced his worst fear. “Commander, the combined mass in the matter stream has dropped by 27 percent. We may have lost one of them.”

All eyes watched in anticipation as the three figures reemerged on the transporter pad. It took but a moment to realize something was terribly wrong.
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When Kathryn materialized on the transporter pad, she immediately knew there had been a malfunction. Her body felt light and the ceiling looked taller. Much of the peach nightgown she had on was pooling around her bare feet as one strap slid off her much slighter shoulders.

“Kahless! What the hell…” B’Elanna’s voice caught Kathryn’s attention as she looked over to her Chief Engineer. It was B’Elanna’s voice, coming from a body that appeared to be that of a child. As with Kathryn, B’Elanna’s clothing was three sizes too large for her smaller frame. “Kathryn… Captain… What happened to us? You look like you are 14 years old!”

Kathryn was distracted by the sound of a sharp intake of breath next to her. She turned to the source of the noise in time to see a look of sheer panic on Seven’s face.

“Kathryn! My eye. I can no longer see.” She reached up with her right hand discover the absence of her star shaped implant on her jaw. “My implants are gone.”

In the space of a minute, Kathryn realized that she was no longer holding Seven’s left hand. Instead she had a piece of the red silky PJs clutched in her palm. She remembered squeezing Seven’s hand as the transporter beam initialized, but it was gone now. When Kathryn looked down to where their hands were joined, she gasped out loud.

Seven was startled by the sound and looked to her left, concern for Kathryn’s well-being still taking precedent over anything else. When she saw Kathryn looking down at her own hand, Seven attempted to take it again in an effort to comfort and reassure the
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woman she loved. It was then Seven discovered that beneath the sleeve of her PJs, her Borg-enhanced hand was absent. “Kath… Captain, I am damaged. My hand and lower arm. They are gone. I do not understand what has happened!”

Kathryn was terrified, but Captain Janeway held it in. A tendril of fear threatened her command mask as she looked back upward into the face of the woman who meant everything to her. Seven was still tall, but not as tall as she had been before. Her frame was smaller and less developed and her long golden hair was dull and lifeless. Her skin had become ashen and the space that held her ocular implant’s artificial eyepiece was now an empty socket.

“Seven, don’t worry. We will figure this out.” Kathryn tried to sound confident, but inside she was concerned about what this meant for the future with Seven that had not even really begun.

In a voice much higher pitched than normal, Captain Janeway barked “Report!”

To be continued…